

HOME CINEMA

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND & VISION

Choice

WIN! WIN!
Denon Wi-Fi/
Bluetooth AV
receiver



Exclusive!
Yamaha's flagship
amp, reviewed p42

Get ready for

Dolby Atmos

The next generation of home cinema sound is here!

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CAPTAIN AMERICA

He's back and better than ever on Blu-ray, see p98

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Sequels that don't suck!

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TOP TEN GEAR GUIDE → WHY WE LOVE BLU-RAY EXTRAS → SKY HD vs VIRGIN

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tannoy.com

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WELCOME

If you believe that sound is 50 per cent of the movie-going experience (a notion famously put forward by George Lucas) then Dolby Atmos should intrigue and excite you. From the early demos I've enjoyed (see



page 18), it's clear that **the cinema audio format, retooled for living rooms, brings a greater dynamism and sense of immersion** to regular

multichannel sonics. In essence it takes that 50 per cent to another level – and with a system upgrade relatively straightforward thanks to some clever acoustic science, I'd suggest you dash out and get a demo. Now.

2014 is therefore shaping up to be a great year for home cinema fans, because as well as the introduction of Atmos, we've seen the 4K TV market really take off. There are plenty of options now when buying a next-gen screen, with price points getting lower and lower. A simultaneous 4K/Atmos makeover? Why not?

Mark Craven
Editor



MENU



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The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



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Adrian Justins:
Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*

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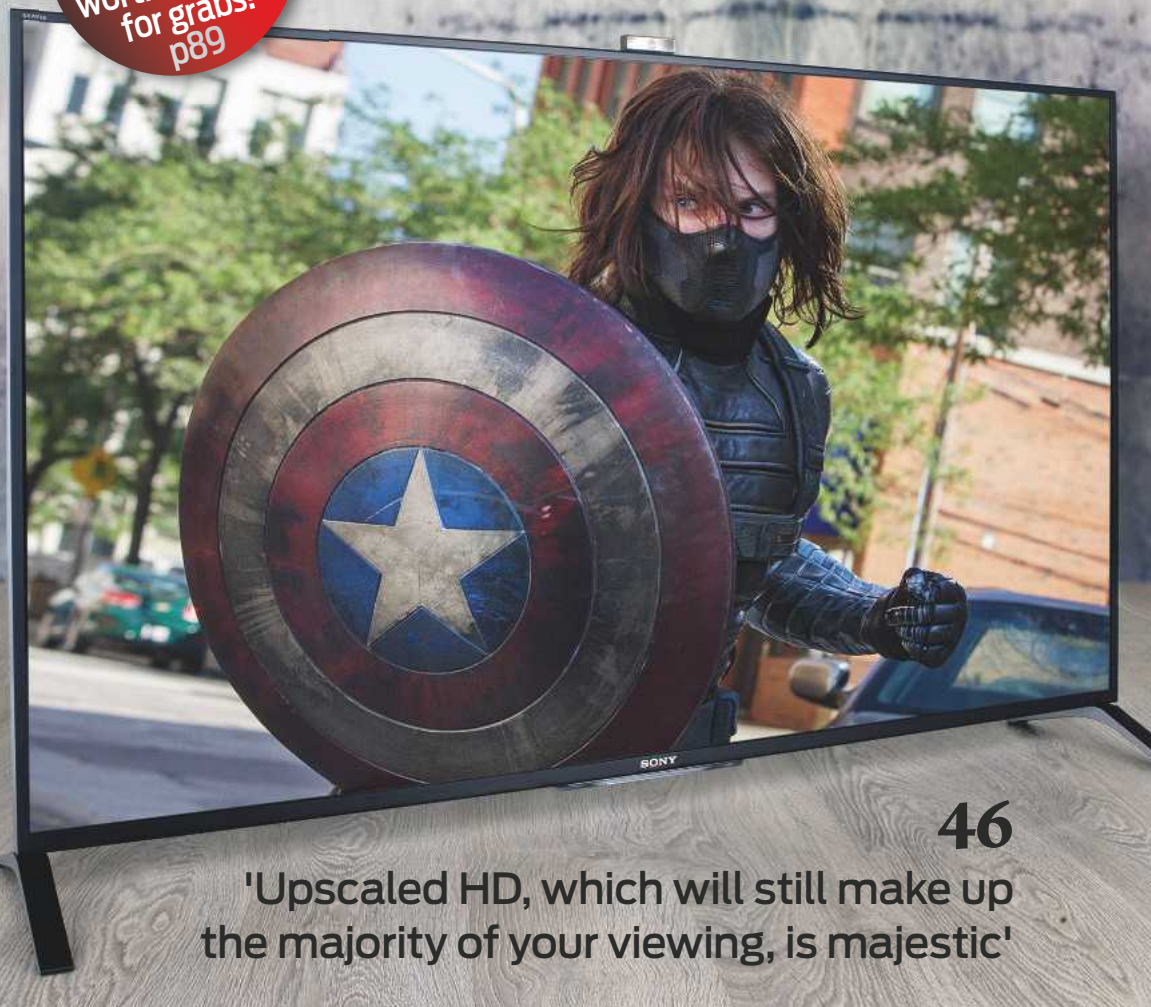
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Sony gets curvy

Sony Bravia S90 Series → www.sony.co.uk

Sony is gearing up to join the curved TV party with its new S90 range of 4K screens. Currently running to just two models at 75in and 65in, the S90s are armed with bespoke Triluminos display tech and X-Reality PRO processing, and employ a new 4.2-channel 'Multi-angle Live Speaker' system. This, says the big S, employs separate drive units to direct front left/right and surround channels into your room at 'carefully-controlled angles.' The idea is to create an immersive 360-degree soundfield. As always, the proof will be in the pudding...

ACTION ERUPTS!

Gladiator meets Earthquake when Pompeii 3D hits Blu-ray, p96

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Aiming high

Definitive Technology A60 → www.definitivetech.com

Definitive Technology has launched a Dolby Atmos add-on speaker designed to fit its BP-8060ST floorstanders. The up-firing A60 (priced at £400 per pair) hides a 4in driver in its slender cabinet, and slots snugly on to the brand's innovative bipolar tower speaker (pictured right), with a cable clip provided to keep the additional speaker wire out of sight. As the BP-8060STs offer a slim-width design of just 15cm, and a built-in powered (300W) 10in subwoofer aided by passive radiators, it should be easy to assemble a stealth Atmos package. Expect UK retailers to begin offering complete systems, incorporating the CS8040HD centre speaker (below) and SM55 bookshelves (not pictured).



The A60s have been manufactured to be a perfect fit for DefTech's BP-8060ST floorstanders, clipping onto the top baffle

Xbox loves telly



TV fans can pick up a dedicated digital TV tuner for their Xbox One from late October,

introduced by Microsoft as an alternative to feeding a set-top box through the next-gen console's HDMI inputs. Priced at £25 approx, the Xbox One Digital TV Tuner plugs in via USB and caters for DVB-T and DVB-T2. TV listings from the One Guide (with voice search with Kinect hardware), pausing of live broadcasts and viewing in Snap mode (split-screen) are among the bonus features supported.

www.xbox.com

MASS dares to stream



Monitor Audio has announced a new MA100 package that

partners its A100 networkable stereo amp with a pair of its MASS 10 bookshelf speakers to create a stylish all-in-one audio solution. The A100 offers 2 x 50W Class A/B amplification in addition to DLNA and Apple AirPlay audio streaming, plus analogue and optical digital hookup. The MASS 10 speaker utilises the brand's C-CAM driver tech for its 1in tweeter and 4in mid/bass drivers. The price for the MA100 is £550.

www.monitoraudio.co.uk

LG joins music mob



LG has followed in the footsteps of Sonos,

Samsung, Audio Pro and Denon by launching a multiroom audio solution. Comprising the Music Flow H3, H5 and H7 speakers, HS6 soundbar, network bridge and Android/iOS control app, LG says the system allows users to manage and access their entire digital music library stored on multiple networked devices. Support for 192kHz/24-bit audio, and streaming clients such as Spotify and Deezer, is also offered. Pricing is still TBC. www.lg.com/uk

Sky adds suggested content

We've been doing that since 2010, responds Virgin Media TiVo

Sky is rolling out yet another revamp of its user interface and EPG, this time incorporating recommended content based on what subscribers have already recorded or downloaded.

On the face of it, it's a similar feature to that found on some current Smart TVs and made famous by the TiVo service, first in the US and more recently by Virgin Media in the UK. The recommendations system doesn't incorporate user-rating in the thumbs up/down style of TiVo, however, something Sky claims is a strength.

Explains the company's Brand Director, TV Products, Luke Bradley-Jones: 'We've introduced a new and recommended section to the homepage, which includes a Suggestions feature. This makes recommendations to our customers based on recent recordings or downloads they've made in their planner. And we think this is the best way of making relevant and personalised recommendations, and really sets us apart from other recommendations services out there in the market.'

Other new features include Smart Series Link, which ensures your Sky+HD box records subsequent seasons of a linked series; a Sports tile on the homepage for quicker access to Sky's flagship channels; and DVD cover art added to Sky Movies and the Sky Store to help browsing.

The software update began at the end of August, and Sky says it expects to have its Sky+HD customer base up to speed by 'the winter'.



Virgin Media was lightning-fast to respond: 'Virgin Media TiVo has provided a suggestion and recommendation feature since it launched in 2010,' said a spokesperson. 'In addition, TiVo also records programmes it thinks customers will like based on their viewing of other

shows and movies, as well as taking into account programmes rated using the thumbs up and thumbs down feature.'

And in a parting shot, the cable giant added: 'Virgin Media's TiVo was also the first digital entertainment service to integrate web and TV in the UK, with the addition of Netflix, YouTube, interactive games and more.'

The new updates to the Sky user interface follow tweaks earlier this year, including an enhanced search function and an overhauled homepage to give on-demand and catch-up content more exposure.



Virgin Media's TiVo service tracks what you watch

PLAYLIST...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

Twin Peaks: The Entire Mystery (All-region BD)

Stunning new 1080p restorations and a plethora of unmissable extras ensure that the wait was definitely worth it. One of the year's best.



Starred Up (Region B BD)



Rising star Jack O'Connell delivers a superb performance as a young offender transferred to an adult prison in this explosive drama.

Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins (Region B BD)



We never thought we'd see this cult action flick in HD, let alone treated with this much TLC.

Rio 2 (All-region BD)



This energetic animated sequel will delight kids with its goofy gags and adults with the top-quality AV.

Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Xbox 360/PS3/PC)



Playing *Risen 3* (see p100) gave us a hankering to return to Bethesda's epic RPG masterpiece. Will we ever uncover all of its secrets?

EXTRAS...

Small items that could make a big impression

The Amicus Anthology



Delve into the history of cinema's most famous purveyor of portmanteau fright flicks with author

Bruce G. Hallenbeck's exhaustively researched and lavishly-illustrated tome. A must-read for genre fans.

Wonder Woman



The latest addition to Sideshow Collectibles' DC Comics Premium Format Figures is this spectacular Wonder

Woman statue, which stands 25.5in tall, costs \$400 and is limited to just 3,500 pieces.

The Art of John Alvin



This gorgeous book celebrates the iconic film poster art of the late, great John Alvin.

Packed with finished posters, sketches and commentary from his wife Andrea Alvin, it's an indispensable addition to every film fan's library.

Sin City Nancy figure



Invite Jessica Alba (or at least a seven-inch plastic version) into your home cinema room with this ultra-articulated £20 action figure.

Digital sees explosive growth

Downloads up, disc sales down – but tipping point yet to be reached



The UK video market has seen a whopping 33 per cent increase in the value of digital purchases, according to figures released by the British Video Association (BVA) for first half of 2014.

The upsurge in growth means those paying for film and TV content digitally accounted for £360m of the total £909m UK market. Sales of physical discs amounted to £549m (physical rentals aren't included in the figures), but this represents a 13 per cent drop year-on-year.

Overall, the combined market grew by a modest 0.7 per cent, illustrating that our desire for movies isn't changing, just the way we acquire them – digital is now worth around 39 per cent of the home entertainment pie. Unsurprisingly, the BVA attributes this rapid revenue rise to the growing popularity of net-connected devices, faster broadband speeds and easy access to video services.

These figures could make somewhat worrying reading for die-hard disc collectors fearful that studios could give up on physical altogether. However, the BVA's stats also highlight that discs are catering heavily towards those who want to buy and own a title, rather than just renting. 'With more than 63 million discs sold this year to date,

ownership is dominated by DVD and Blu-ray disc,' says the organisation. 'Discs represented 88 per cent of the total ownership market in the first six months.'

Or put another way, those who are spending money on digital are streaming to watch once – let's call it the Netflix effect.

Frozen heats up disc sales

Also included in the figures was a breakdown of the best-selling discs (both DVDs and Blu-rays) for the first half of the year. Walt Disney's mega hit *Frozen* topped the pile, something the BVA equates to an unprecedented 59 per cent rise in spending on 'new release children's DVDs.'

Taking second spot was Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, followed by *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Gravity*, *Thor: The Dark World*, *Rush*, *Captain Phillips* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Ninth in the chart was the *Game of Thrones: The Complete Third Season* boxset, with Oscar-winner *12 Years a Slave* grabbing tenth place.

With the top three titles alone selling almost four million discs between them according to outgoing BVA director general Lavinia Carey, it's clear that discs aren't dead.

Double your listening pleasure

B&W's latest loudspeaker lineup adds advanced tweeter to all models

Following the introduction of its 'decoupled double dome' tweeter to last year's CM10 speaker, Bowers & Wilkins has taken the next logical step and expanded the technology across the full range.

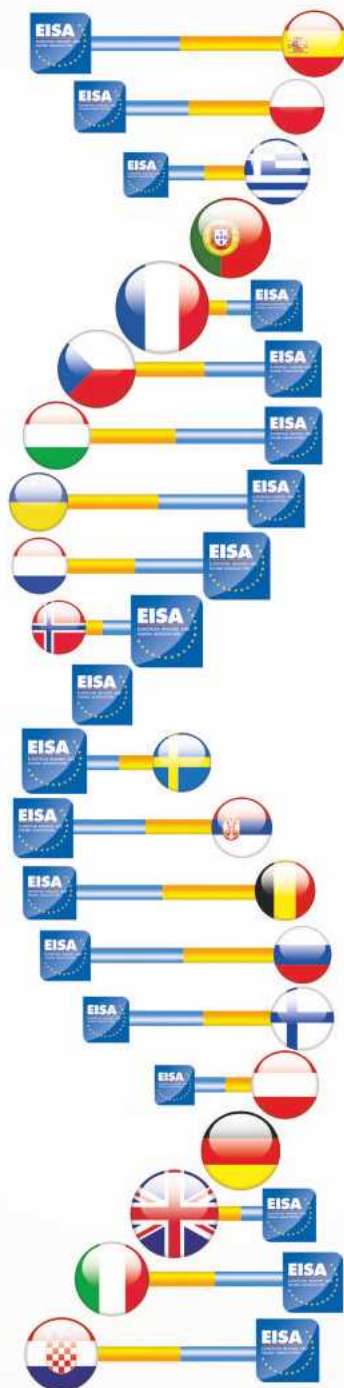
The re-jigged tweeters use a thin aluminium dome surrounded by a thicker aluminium ring; a mix of lightness and rigidity that the company says helps to prevent audible distortion. Imaging and dispersion also claim an improvement by decoupling the tweeter from the cabinet using a gel-ring cushioning.

The range has also been given a design overhaul, removing visible fixings from the cabinets and adding 'acoustically optimised' grilles to the tweeters.

The new CM Series line-up consists of a trio of floorstanders (CM8 S2, CM9 S2 and flagship CM10 S2) priced between £1,500 and £3,000 per pair; three standmount models (CM1 S2, CM5 S2 and CM6 S2) priced between £650 and £1,500 per pair, two centres (CM Centre S2 and CM Centre 2 S2) priced £500 and £800 respectively; and the ASW10CM S2 active subwoofer, priced at £1,000. Bowers & Wilkins has also introduced a new speaker stand for the range, the FS-CM, for £400 per pair.



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DIARY

Our calendar ensures that you don't miss out...

→ SEPTEMBER

19: A Walk Among the Tombstones

Team HCC will be hitting the local multiplex today to catch this new crime thriller starring Liam Neeson, adapted from the hit 'Matthew Scudder' novels by Lawrence Sanders. www.entertainment.co.uk



22: Fargo: Complete Season One

The year's best new TV series makes its debut on BD and DVD today. Perfect for those who missed it first time around or simply want to savour it all over again. www.fox.co.uk

24: Connect with CEDIA London

This informal trade-only event offers members of the CI industry the chance to talk to members of CEDIA and join in a 'State of the Industry' roundtable discussion. www.cedia.co.uk

29: 300: Rise of an Empire 3D

The belated sequel to Zack Snyder's muscular swords 'n' sandals flick finally arrives on DVD, Blu-ray and 3D Blu-ray on these shores. www.warnerbros.co.uk

→ OCTOBER

03: Gone Girl

David Fincher directs this eagerly-anticipated adaptation of Gillian Flynn's best-selling crime novel, starring Ben Affleck. Hunt down the truth in cinemas from today. www.fox.co.uk

10: Annabelle



The Conjuring's evil doll Annabelle gets her own spin-off movie just in time for Halloween. Expect plenty of shocks and scares (particularly if you suffer from pediophobia) if you pop into the cinema today. www.warnerbros.co.uk

13: Edge of Tomorrow

This Tom Cruise sci-fi flick underperformed at the box office, but we expect its mix of high-octane action and smart storytelling will find an appreciative audience when it hits Blu-ray and DVD. www.warnerbros.co.uk

16: HCC #240

The next issue of your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and in-depth software reviews. www.homecinemachoice.com

Yamaha lights up AV

Japanese giant expands Relit line; intros new subwoofer and soundbar

Following a Summer spent launching home cinema AV receivers across various price points, Yamaha has shifted its focus toward a new category – named Interior Audio – that sees it expand upon the light-and-sound concept popularised by last year's Relit speaker.

The Relit LSX-700 married a triple-driver tower speaker, and Bluetooth and 3.5mm input, with a top-mounted LED array for an eye-catching audio solution. Control is achieved via a smart device app. The speaker is now joined by the Relit LSX-170 desktop speaker (priced around £360) and the LSX-70 portable speaker, which claims an eight-hour battery life and should retail for around £460 when it hits shops in the Winter. 'These products scream style,' reckons Yamaha.

Equally stylish is the company's new Restio ISX-803D slim-line speaker, again part of the Interior Audio line. Created, says Yamaha, to reimagine the concept of a music source as part of a home's decor, it sports a square, minimalist design and can be wall-hung or mounted on a pole stand. Built-in Bluetooth (with NFC pairing), digital radio, CD, USB and auxiliary inputs cater for multiple sources, while the driver array partners twin 4in woofers with 1.25in soft dome tweeters.

New year, new subwoofer

Also due to arrive – but not until early Spring 2015 – is a new flagship subwoofer, the NS-SW1000. This bass bin, designed to partner the



Yamaha hopes to Relit your fire for desktop audio with the LSX-170...

brand's floorstanding Suavo speaker line, employs a front-firing 12in driver, 1,000W power plant and a Twisted Flare Port. The latter is a bespoke Yamaha invention: 'This port twists air out in a clean and smooth way to avoid extra noise from the sub, giving you a bigger and cleaner sound.' The NS-SW1000 is tentatively priced at £1,400.

Rounding out a 15-strong product launch (which also includes stereo hi-fi amplifiers and streamers, plus headphones) is the YAS-203 soundbar. This replaces the YAS-201. A mid-range (£400) model, it's supplied with a wireless subwoofer and employs

Air Surround Extreme processing technology to craft a more immersive soundfield from its straight-up stereo speaker configuration. Bluetooth music streaming is supported, while movie fans are offered coaxial and optical digital audio sockets in addition to Dolby Digital and DTS decoding.



Flagship sub to debut next Spring

Platinum finish



Dynaudio's Confidence Platinum speaker range is now available in the UK. The high-end line-up consists of the C1 standmount (pictured), the C2 and C4 floorstanders, plus the

self-explanatory Centre – with prices starting at £6,650 and going up to £17,700. While the technology inside the speakers remains the same as in previous Confidence models, the Platinum range features an updated external aesthetic designed to evoke the appearance of the brand's flagship Evidence Platinum range. www.dynaudio.com/uk

Condition your kit



Hampshire-based power management specialist IsoTek has introduced an upgraded

EVO3 Special Edition of its Syncro power cable. Claiming to be the brand's most advanced mains cable to date (you'd hope so given the £1,200 price tag) the new version of the Syncro employs IsoTek's EVO3 Optimum cable, which boasts a design that promises outstanding electrical conductivity, high-quality Teflon FEP insulation and bespoke audiophile-grade 24-carat gold-plated connectors. Swish. www.isoteksystems.com

Certified soundbar



German speaker manufacturer Teufel Audio has launched the successor to its

Cinebar 51 THX, which made a splash in 2012 as the world's first THX-certified soundbar. The Cinebar 52 THX will set you back £800, packs six drivers (4 x 4in midrange units and two 1in tweeters), and ships with a separate 250W/10in subwoofer. Connectivity includes a class-leading four HDMI inputs (and one output), plus pairs of coaxial and optical digital audio inputs. We're not sure we have enough sources... www.teufelaudio.com/uk

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 'We want them here and we want them now!'

Arrow Video has revealed that it will be releasing a 2K restoration of cult favourite *Withnail & I* in a dual-format Blu-ray and DVD boxset on October 20. The set also includes an HD version of writer-director Bruce Robinson's follow-up feature *How to Get Ahead in Advertising*, two commentaries, documentaries, interviews and a 200-page coffee-table book. Fans should head over to www.withnailfilm.com to find out how they can order a limited numbered and personalised version.

2 Pirate jailed

A 25-year old man has been jailed for 33 months for recording *Fast & Furious 6* from the back of a cinema in Walsall. According to the Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT), the video was downloaded 700,000 times and represented 'millions of pounds' lost for the film's distributor Universal Pictures.

3 Now TV adds new sport pass

Sky has launched a new Sky Sports Week Pass for its Now TV service that offers users access to all seven of the satcaster's sports channels for a seven-day period. This sits alongside the current Sky Sports Day Pass.

4 CEDIA elects Vice Chair

Alister Smith, MD at London-based systems integrator DLUK, has been elected Vice Chair of CEDIA Region 1's volunteer Board of Directors. Smith is stepping into the shoes of Kris Hogg (MD of custom install company Konnectiv), who took the position of Chair back in February.

5 Spotify Connects with more tech partners

Spotify has named several new partners for its Apple AirPlay rival Spotify Connect. The newcomers include Bose, Panasonic and Philips, with the latter adding the feature to its 2014 Android-powered Smart TVs. Spotify Connect is also making its debut on multi-room audio systems, with the Bose SoundTouch and Pure Jongo being lined up to offer the feature.

6 Samsung boosts 4K content

Samsung is gearing up to expand its 4K/Ultra HD ecosystem. The company plans to launch Amazon's UHD VOD service in October and has 'reinforced its partnerships' with several key European providers, including TV and film streaming services Wuaki.tv and CHILI. Following the success of its live UHD stream of *Nabucco* back in May, Samsung is also promising ten further live performances made available through the Vienna Opera App in the coming year, including a New Year's Eve performance of *Die Fledermaus*.

7 4K TV to remain niche for now

A new report published by research analysts The Diffusion Group claims that forecasts for consumer uptake of 4K/Ultra HD-enabled devices are 'overly optimistic' and that it will remain a niche market for another five years. Thankfully, it also claims that things will pick up after 2019.

8 Giraffic aids Samsung's HD streaming

Samsung has joined forces with tech pioneer Giraffic to use its Adaptive Video Acceleration (AVA) software to help eliminate buffering interruptions and inconsistent video quality streaming in the Korean tech giant's 2014 line-up of TVs and Blu-ray players.

9 Amazon's feeling Twitchy

Online retailer Amazon has acquired the live video game streaming service Twitch in a deal reported to be worth \$970m. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos stated: 'Broadcasting and watching gameplay is a global phenomenon and Twitch brings together tens of millions of people who watch billions of minutes of games each month.'

10 Glasses-free 3D on the go

Wanna give your smartphone or tablet a 3D makeover? Probably not, but the EyeFly 3D, available from www.iwoot.com for just £17.99, does exactly that. It acts like a traditional screen protector, but employs 500,000 microscopic lenses less than 0.001mm in size to render glasses-free 3D imagery. As well as allowing you to watch native stereoscopic content, the EyeFly 3D app can be used to convert your 2D videos to 3D.



A budget way to sample glasses-free 3D on your phone

PREMIERE

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Adventure begins again

Shane Black has been tapped to bring *The Destroyer* books to cinemas. This is the second attempt at shifting the series to the silver screen, the first being 1985's *Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins*.

Minority reports for TV



Steven Spielberg's smallscreen production outfit Amblin Television is currently developing a TV version of the director's 2002 sci-fi hit *Minority Report*. The show is being worked on in conjunction with 20th Century Fox TV and Paramount TV, with *Godzilla* scribe Max Borenstein on writing duties.

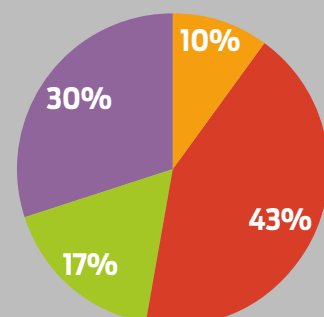
London's burning

Gerard Butler, Aaron Eckhart and Morgan Freeman have all signed for the sequel to the White-House-under-siege thriller *Olympus Has Fallen*. Titled *London Has Fallen*, the film will have all hell breaking loose once again when Eckhart's US President visits Blighty to attend the funeral of a British PM.

WE ASKED...

On which part of your AV setup have you spent the most money?

■ AVR/Amp/Processor
■ Television ■ Projector
■ Loudspeakers



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Back to the future

X-Men: Days of Future Past → 20th Century Fox → Region A/B BD & R2 DVD

Director Bryan Singer returns to the world of the X-Men with an epic time-travelling mutant mash-up that unites the characters from the original film trilogy with their younger ...*First Class* incarnations. The action-packed *X-Men: Days of Future Past* hits DVD, Blu-ray and 3D Blu-ray on November 10, with the hi-def versions also offering six behind-the-scenes featurettes, a gag reel and deleted scenes. Although there's still no word on Dolby Atmos audio...



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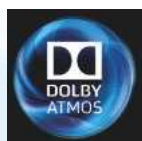
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Dolby Atmos

HOME CINEMA SOUND REINVENTED?

Object-based audio and upfiring speakers are about to become a part of your home cinema vocabulary. **Mark Craven** heads to Dolby's UK HQ to get an earful of the newest audio format in town – and leaves highly impressed

Captain America: The Winter Soldier led this Summer's Atmos explosion



EVER SINCE IT arrived with Disney Pixar's *Brave* back in 2012, Dolby Atmos has been kicking up a cinematic storm, ushering in an era of 'object-based' precision surround

sound audio that's left theatre-goers gawping. The question on AV enthusiasts' lips has been – 'how will it translate to the home?' *HCC* can comfortably say, following an extensive in-depth demonstration of Atmos on a modest setup, that it translates very well indeed. In fact, we'd argue that domesticated Dolby Atmos is a game-changing experience. Once you hear it, you'll want it.

London calling

The HQ of Dolby Laboratories sits in a corner of London's Soho Square, spitting distance from the lair of the Football Association (FA) and the offices of Twentieth Century Fox. It's a nondescript place from the outside, but inside it holds two Dolby Atmos screening rooms – one a lavish multi-seat venue with super-sized screen, the other a six-seat living room-style setup with flatscreen TV. During the course of an afternoon, we're ushered between the two, so we can gauge exactly how comfortably Dolby Atmos can be reworked for smaller environments.

Jonathan Jowitt (also known as JJ) claims the über-cool job title of Dolby Evangelist, and as we take a seat in the larger screening room it's clear he's evangelical about Atmos.

'It's the most successful cinema technology we've had. Over 120 films so far, with plenty more on the way. 650 cinemas worldwide. 2014 is shaping up to be a good year. Feedback from cinemagoers has been brilliant. They talk about being immersed in the action. I've watched *Gravity* in here and people have been ducking...'

Content makers love Atmos too, we're told. 'Filmmakers have artistic freedom they never had before,' says Jowitt. 'Before, you had dialogue, music and special effects fighting for space. Now you can say, "let's put this here".'

'And we're really excited that Atmos is coming to the home,' adds Jowitt. 'It's a process we've been working on for more than a year. We've had to reverse engineer how the brain interprets overhead sound.' More on that later...

The main screening room at Dolby's HQ uses 36 speakers, with five on the front soundstage (left, left-centre, centre, right-centre and right)

'Domesticated Dolby Atmos is a game-changing experience. Once you hear it, you'll want it'

and the rest in the ceiling and around the walls. It's a typical commercial Atmos array, although the technology is scalable. You can very quickly get to 64 speakers, says Jowitt.

Sonic typhoon

The experience in this dedicated theatre is sublime – a full-range, fully-enveloping sonic typhoon of clinical sound placement. Sequences, ranging from a Red Bull F1 showcase to the Pixar short *Leaf*, offer startling levels of crystal-clear imaging. A bird, flapping its wings and gently chirruping, circles the room off-screen with 360-degree panache and believability; the roar of a car engine zips by from front right to rear right and you can practically smell the petrol fumes.

This laser-like audio placement is made possible by Dolby Atmos' object-based approach to sound design, which reshapes movie sound into something





much more flexible than before. Rather than simply ushering audio to, say, the surround right channel, it enables objects (which can mean anything, from a bullet to dialogue to a French horn, and at any size) to be tracked in the deep, wide, hemispherical soundfield. The metadata assigned to objects (which can number up to 118 simultaneously) is processed by Dolby's Atmos Cinema Processor in real-time, marshalling the output of the speaker array to create the desired effect.

Yet for domesticated Atmos, with fewer speakers and less insane hardware, Dolby introduces spatial coding, bolted on to a TrueHD or Dolby Digital Plus bitstream, to reconfigure the Atmos soundmix to its new environment. The beauty of Atmos, says Jowitt, is that its flexibility means it can still work authentically on smaller speaker systems.

Buyers will need a new Dolby Atmos-certified AVR or processor, but no new Blu-ray player – a regular deck set to output a bitstream will suffice. And Atmos Blu-rays are backwards compatible with non-Atmos systems, with ignorant hardware simply playing out the regular 5.1 or 7.1 TrueHD mix.

The second key part of the Atmos experience is the overhead sound, and those in-ceiling speakers do a lot of work. A run-through of the opening escape sequence from *Star Trek Into Darkness* illustrates how being able to track an object both vertically and horizontally pays dividends even at a subtle level – dialogue follows Spock's head as he bounces around the screen, for instance.

Yet these heavenly speakers are the perceived stumbling block to domestic take up. 'In the home,

ceiling speakers could be impractical,' admits Jowitt. Dolby's solution, for those not able to fit in-ceiling speakers, has been to address how the brain perceives overhead sound and formulate up-firing speakers that can be placed in the cinema room, most likely on top of existing floorstanders.

Jowitt explains that science boffins have shown that sounds from above hit both ears at the same time, but with missing high-frequency information,

allowing our grey matter to understand they are coming from above, rather than to the side. Dolby Atmos-certified upfiring speakers incorporate a high-frequency notch-filter, to ensure that when the sound has been reflected from the ceiling it emulates the frequency characteristics of authentic overhead sound and 'tricks' the brain accordingly.

Denon has a duo of high-end Atmos AV receivers lined up this Autumn



The commercial-style Atmos cinema at Dolby's HQ uses 36 speakers!





Upfiring Atmos speakers: KEF prototypes (above) in Dolby's demo suite and Onkyo's first-to-market SKH-410 pair (right)

It's this reason why you can't just wire in some regular speakers and simply angle them upwards.

In the smaller theatre, four upward-firing speakers are mounted on a quartet of floorstanding models. All speakers are from KEF – the upfiringers are prototypes, but it certainly indicates the UK brand could follow the likes of Onkyo and Definitive Technology in launching Atmos enclosures. In Dolby's room they are placed on the front left/right and rear back pair (not the surrounds). Two Bowers & Wilkins subwoofers complete the array, which is known as 7.2.4 (the four being the upfiringers).

However, also in the setup, fitted into the ceiling, is a quartet of down-firing speakers. Dolby is able to flick between these and the upfiringers at the press of a button, showcasing the sonic difference between the two solutions.

Jowitt spins the same clips from earlier, and reveals that at first he won't be telling us whether the overhead audio is being delivered via the ceiling speakers or the upfiring models. We dutifully set our ears to critical mode.

Spotting the difference

Our first impression (beyond the fact that this 7.2.4 array naturally isn't as jaw-droppingly potent in size and dynamics as its 36-speaker partner) is that it's hard to tell. We predicted that the first sequence came via overheads, the second via upfiringers. Both were from the latter. We were,

therefore, half right – the Pixar *Leaf* sequence had a more diffuse presentation via the upfiring KEFs, which was clear.

Yet the difference with other material was not so apparent, and on this showing, it seems that Dolby's add-on speaker concept has tackled the problem efficiently.

Interestingly, the company says that in some rooms upfiringers may be preferable to

in-ceiling speakers, if the height of the ceiling means they're too near the listening positioning. 'Dolby Atmos enabled speakers may better reproduce the Dolby Atmos sound you would hear in a movie theatre, where the overhead speakers are high in the auditorium, creating a more diffuse experience.'



5 REASONS TO BE EXCITED ABOUT DOLBY ATMOS

HOME CINEMA
Choice

Cut this out and keep it for when you need to persuade your bank manager/partner/interior decorator

FILM STUDIOS LOVE IT!

Rival next-gen audio format Auro 3D has bagged some theatrical releases from DreamWorks, but can't compete with Atmos' wide-ranging studio backing. Recent blockbusters such as *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *The Expendables 3*, *Lucy*, *Hercules* and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* have all sported Atmos soundtracks. Expect a swathe of BDs to appear.

IT HAS HARDWARE SUPPORT

The mass-market AV receiver brands are right behind Atmos (no doubt they see it as a good way to reignite consumer interest in multichannel audio) and this means plenty of choice available when it comes to upgrading your AVR. Yes, you will need a new amp or processor, but it shouldn't be hard to find something that fits your budget.

YOU WON'T NEED A NEW BD PLAYER

Dolby has added Atmos to its TrueHD audio technology (as well as the Dolby Digital Plus codec used by the likes of Netflix), so no new source playback hardware isn't required to savour object-based audio excitement – a regular Blu-ray player, set to bitstream output, will get the job done.

IT'S FLEXIBLE REGARDING SPEAKERS

Atmos at home comes in various flavours – running from 5.1.2 through 7.2.4 and beyond – and doesn't have to be based on in-ceiling models. Most of the time, the add-on upfiring speakers can be used with your existing system, providing a low-cost Atmos boost if you don't fancy a room overhaul.

IT SOUNDS GREAT!

From our initial demos, it's clear that Dolby Atmos provides a step up in home cinema sound that will please film fans with a love of multichannel audio. The precise object placement and larger soundfield (courtesy of those ceiling speakers) creates an experience that's simply more immersive than a standard 5.1 or 7.1 setup.

The reflection method has been designed for rooms with ceiling heights between 8ft-9ft (2.4m-2.7m). It has been tested to work at heights up to a whopping 14ft, but Dolby admits the effect may become more ethereal than it ought to be.

Beyond the slight performance difference between the two solutions, it's important to stress that 7.2.4 Atmos retains the clarity and absorbing nature of its commercial progenitor. Even with fewer enclosures to titillate, object-based tricks such as a Nibiru spear whistling straight toward you in *Star Trek Into Darkness* don't lose their appeal.

The burning questions after our demo are when will Atmos Blu-rays arrive, and what titles will they be. Unfortunately, Jowitt either isn't at liberty to say or simply doesn't know. Dolby, after all, isn't involved in commercial Blu-ray production. The clip from *Star Trek Into Darkness*, we're told, has been done by Paramount as a test, and in no way should be taken as an indication that there will be a corresponding Atmos BD release.

'In the coming months,' is the best answer Dolby can provide. 'Black Friday is a key date in the US...' offers Jowitt with a shrug.

And what about hardware? This Summer witnessed a plethora of product launches from AVR makers, including Denon, Marantz, Onkyo, Pioneer and Yamaha, ensuring that audio fans can grab an AV receiver upgrade at a variety of price points. Atmos-enabled processors, meanwhile, including Marantz's AV7702, Onkyo's PR-SC5530 and a 32-channel high-end model from French specialist Trinnov, cater for those with pre/power-based separates setups.

Atmos-enabled speakers, at the time of writing, are more thin on the ground. Yet those avoiding the in-ceiling route can already order those add-on enclosures from Onkyo and Definitive Technology, and more are certain to follow. You can also expect Atmos floorstanders with separately driven upfiring speakers built-in to their cabinets, and even Atmos-enabled soundbars, to make their presence felt in the future.

A convincing beginning

There's a tendency amongst AV fans to regard new tech developments with a suspicious eye; excitement comes mixed with apprehension, a symptom of too many damp squibs and disappointments over the years. The challenge for Dolby Atmos – or rather the hardware and software manufacturers – is to win over wavering enthusiasts unsure if any new investment is warranted.

Personally, I'm already convinced. The aural experience provided by Dolby in its sensible-sized screening room proves Atmos is a commercial cinema tech with the brains to work on a smaller scale, and any misgivings I had about those upfiring speakers were pretty much eradicated. In fact, as they negate the need to rip out your plasterwork, I can see these being an easily-swallowable upgrade for home cinema fans. Plonk some Atmos modules on your front and rear channels and away you go – once you've bought a new AVR of course... ■

ATMOS SETUPS EXPLAINED

Four speaker configurations that you may be considering for your Dolby Atmos cinema room makeover



7.1.4 mounted:
This is the setup that those performing a new room build may be tempted by, with a quartet of in-ceiling speakers providing the height element of Atmos, married to a traditional seven-channel array. Note that you'll need eleven channels of amplification, though...



7.1.4 upfiring:
Another system using eleven amp channels, this utilises add-on speakers, mounted to the front L/R and rear L/R speakers in a standard 7.1 configuration. Due to their more diffuse sonic signature, Dolby's placement diagram has them aimed slightly further into the room than with in-ceiling models.



5.1.2 mounted:
Using a regular 5.1-channel setup, but with two in-ceiling speakers, positioned fairly centrally. This only requires a seven-channel Atmos amp. Dolby's advice for ceiling-mounters: make sure your ceiling is flat, and ideally more than eight feet high. The company has tested up to 14 feet, but suggests the effect does become more diffuse with ceilings at this height.



5.1.2 upfiring:
The simplest Atmos upgrade, incorporating upfiring speakers at the front L/R position. As with all Atmos speakers, these could be add-on models or forthcoming integrated floorstanders. Power-wise, this again uses only seven amp channels.

Home cinema

Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D?

Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation.

The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance

of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either, as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems

selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity. Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

“ Home cinema
so good you'll believe
you're there! ”



Selecting and installing
home cinema on a
DIY basis may leave
the system performing
at way below its
optimum level.

Confused ?

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...don't start with WHAT, start with WHERE. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit you.

Buying or being sold to

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.



The Dealers listed below have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

Our Top20 AV shops in the country

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INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead

AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995
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MARTINS HI-FI

85-91 Ber Street. 01603 627134
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01268 776932
www.rayleighhifi.com

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69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007
www.kenthomecinema.co.uk

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...Talk to the experts



4K VIA SATELLITE? IT'S ALREADY OUT THERE...

You might need some new hardware to get it, and there's not a lot of it, says **Martin Pipe**, but free-to-air 3,840 x 2,160 material offers a glimpse of a 4K future

TEMPTED TO MAKE your next TV a 4K model instead of a Full HD one? Of course you are: video with a resolution of 3,840 x 2,160 – four times the number of pixels offered by Full HD – coupled with the potential for fast refresh rates and more vivid colours, is an enticing prospect. You've heard about how Blu-ray could be updated for UHD, taken an interest in Sky's 4K experiments and been impressed by Netflix's commitment to streaming some content in the stonking new format. The problem is that, Netflix apart, there's not an awful lot of stuff out there in 4K, so if you're an early adopter, you're limited to upscaling HD content. Or are you?

Let's go back in time

There's a strong parallel between the dawn of hi-def and the current Ultra HD situation. In 2004, UK viewers had practically no HD content to choose from (I seem to remember you could, for a while, buy DVDs containing Microsoft WMV9 encodes of, erm, adult material that could only be played on a PC, which wasn't exactly what consumers wanted. Well, most of them anyway...). Envious eyes turned to the US, where digital HDTV had been established in the late 1990s, and some tech-savvy UK AV enthusiasts began importing D-Theater VCRs and tapes (including off-air recordings of subscription channel movies) as well as downloading 'transport-stream' (.ts) files of US HD broadcasts from internet forums. For the first time, the potential

of HDTV could be seen in UK homes, albeit via rather tortuous means.

What was needed was something for Europe. Enter a pioneering TV channel. In 2004, Euro1080 started beaming hi-def eye-candy to Europe via satellite. Aimed mostly at those selling HDTVs for a living, Euro1080 required a new HD set-top box with an analogue component output or DVI port to feed your PJ or plasma telly. It employed the MPEG-2 codec – there was nothing else then available (the US ATSC HDTV broadcast standard, and D-Theater by default, specified it too).

'If you've got the required satellite setup, and a 4K TV with DVB-S2 tuner and HEVC decoder, you can pick up 4K today'

Today's HD channels use H.264 (also known as MPEG-4 AVC), and 4K channels will employ H.265 (also known as HEVC). And if you've got the required satellite TV setup, you can actually pick up the latter already.

There are no 4K set-top boxes (which would need HDMI 2.0 ports) commercially available yet, so you will need a TV with a satellite tuner and H.265/HEVC



Eutelsat, as well as Astra, has launched a 4K demo channel for early adopters

decoding built-in. Current 4K channels are carried via DVB-S2 technology; the BBC's World Cup trials demonstrated that DVB-T2 is capable of carrying 4K as well, but it's not likely to do so for a while, as spectrum is much scarcer than it is on satellite, or, for that matter, cable.

Getting two birds with one dish

Both of the main European direct-to-home (DTH) satellite operators – Eutelsat and Astra – are carrying 4K tests. Eutelsat was one of the first organisations to experiment with domestic satellite reception. Indeed, the original Sky Channel – then intended for distribution by cable TV operators – used one of the Eutelsats back in the 1980s. When Sky went DTH at the end of that decade, it switched its loyalties to the newly-launched Astra satellite operated by Société Européenne des Satellites (SES). And today, Astra satellites are still used to carry the panoply of Sky satellite services into UK homes.

The 4K test broadcasts provided by both SES/Astra and Eutelsat are free-to-air, unencrypted, and can be received in the UK. Unfortunately, it's not a case of disconnecting the dish cable from the back of your Sky+HD PVR and plugging it into your shiny new 4K TV. Sky uses the Astra 2 satellites, which are located at an orbital position of 28.2 degrees east, yet the SES 4K test is carried via an Astra 1 bird, located at 19.2 degrees east. Some readers may remember that Sky's analogue services were carried via Astra satellites at that position.

It may be that you have an old unused 60cm dish, left in position when homes started switching from analogue Sky to Sky Digital in the late 1990s. So could you simply connect that dish – assuming it's still in good condition – to your new TV? Unfortunately, no. You will almost certainly need to change the lump of electronics located at the focal point of the dish. Known as a Low Noise Block down-converter (LNB), its job is to transpose the band ('block') of super-high microwave frequencies used for satellite broadcasting into a band of lower frequencies that cheap coaxial cable can handle.

So why does it need replacing? Well, since TV went digital, the aforementioned band was widened

to accommodate more transponders, allowing more services to be carried; digital broadcasting enabled a multiplex of several channels to occupy the same space as a single analogue one. Multiple co-located Astra satellites provided the additional transponder capacity. Sadly, older LNBs cannot handle all of these frequencies.

The good news is that new 'universal' LNBs split this wide band into two halves, which the set-top box then selects. They're cheap, and a competent enthusiast could replace the old LNB with a new one. Note, however, that a decade or more of wind might have dislodged the dish so that it's no longer aimed at the satellite, or the cable might have deteriorated too. A professional installer will check and remedy such matters.

The dish can also be repointed at the relevant Eutelsat cluster of co-located satellites – which are known as Hotbirds. These are positioned at 13 degrees east.

The offerings of the Eutelsat and Astra clusters differ, and so you might choose to have both. Don't spoil your home with what could be a third dish – gadgets that allow simultaneous Hotbird/Astra 1 reception with a single dish are sold by specialist retailers. The ultimate solution is a motor that physically moves the dish from one satellite to another. These enable a wide range of alternative satellites to be visited as well, bringing even more choice of TV and radio into your home.

Some 4K TVs with in-built satellite tuners have the ability to work with these multiple-satellite rigs >



GETTING 4K SATELLITE

The kit you'll need and what to do with it!

Get a 4K TV with DVB-S2 tuner and HEVC decoder

There are no 4K set-top boxes available (although both Humax and Technomate have hinted at models) so your TV will have to do the grunt work. We successfully received the broadcasts with Samsung's 55in HU7500 TV (reviewed on page 68).

And a satellite dish

If you have a Sky mini-dish, this will be aimed at the wrong satellite. Don't be tempted to reposition it, as decent reception of the Eutelsat 13E and Astra 19.2E clusters is unlikely. And moving it means no more Sky until it's moved back.

An older-style bigger dish is a much better bet. If you still have one (in good condition) on your wall, retrofit it with a newer 'universal' LNB. If you're a die-hard satellite enthusiast, you probably already have a suitable dish/LNB.

Then aim it – and tune in

To pick up the Eutelsat channel (Hotbird 4K1), target Hotbird 13E transponder 121. This has a frequency of 10930 MHz, and vertical polarisation. Other parameters (if your TV asks for them, or you have a PC equipped with DVB-S2 tuner) are as follows: symbol rate, 30000; FEC, 2/3; video PID, 257; audio PID, 258; PCR PID, 257.

To receive Astra's channel (SES UHD Demo Channel), head for Astra 19.2E transponder 35. Its frequency is 10994 MHz, and its polarisation horizontal. Advanced parameters are: symbol rate, 22000; FEC, 9/10; video PID, 110; audio PID, 120; PCR PID 110.

An older, larger dish (left) will be able to receive European signals that a Sky mini-dish (right) isn't designed for

BUT WHAT ABOUT SKY?

What we know about the satcaster and 4K

Sky has long been a keen advocate of advanced TV technology. It was the first to offer an HD platform in the UK, and last August was the first to broadcast a UK event (a West Ham football match) in 4K, with an outside broadcast truck custom-built for the occasion. The match, captured by Sony cameras and stored on UHD EVS servers, was delivered as four synchronised Full HD 'quarter-segments' via a Eutelsat transponder to Sky's Isleworth studios. There, they were reassembled into a 4K 50p feed shown on an 84in TV. This event was intended purely for demo purposes.

Sky is currently biding its time, and cannot yet confirm when (or for that matter if) 4K pay-TV will get a commercial launch. It is, after all, rather hungry in terms of expensive satellite transponder capacity and at this stage the TVs still aren't a mass-market proposition. 'In addition to understanding the production and distribution aspects,' a Sky spokeswoman explains, 'we need to understand how the TV display market responds to 4K – and how quickly sets come to market and get purchased by consumers.'

Note, however, that Sky's walled-garden content will be delivered via one of its set-top boxes – you wouldn't be able to use your set's own DVB-S2 tuner – and this will mean a new HEVC-enabled PVR.

– they support the DiSEqC protocol (which was developed by Eutelsat). The Samsung UE55HU7500 I have been using is even capable of driving dish motors. Although multi-satellite can be self-installed, doing so is tricky and time-consuming. If you don't have endless patience, setting it up is probably best left to a local 'rigger'.

What's available?

Okay, let's assume you've now got access to one (or both) of these satellites. Set your TV to scan for new channels, and after the process has completed cast an eye over the updated channel list. The Hotbird 4K channel is called Hotbird 4K1, while the Astra one is identified as SES UHD Demo Channel – a perfect example of how the AV industry is using both terms (4K and UHD) simultaneously. If the desired channel is not found, try a manual scan. Hotbird and Astra 1 carry well over a thousand channels each; if a scan is finding nothing or only a few services then your equipment should be checked.

A search of Astra might find two other channels of interest (UHD TV and UHD Demo Channel P1). However, these are encrypted as they're not intended for domestic viewing. They are, according to an SES spokesman, 'engineering tests with content not cleared for free-to-air broadcast.'

So what content do you get for your techie efforts? Currently, not a great deal of it. The SES demo contains 10 minutes of 4K travelogue footage of Barcelona and the surrounding region, encoded in HEVC (using the HM10 test profile) with a refresh rate of 30 frames per second. The bitrate of these transmissions ranges between 20 and 30Mbps. Colour depth is currently 8-bit, although SES hopes to move to 10-bit.

SES also plans to soon have two FTA demo channels in operation. One, we have been informed, will be branded 'Astra' for German retailers – the other will be identified onscreen as 'SES' for other markets. Both will be carried via the same transponder but the refresh rate will be upped from the current 30p to 50p.

The HEVC-encoded Eutelsat demo combines 10-bit colour depth and 50p refresh rate, and offers more material. Here, you get a 30-minute loop of material ranging from an overview of Eutelsat's operations, through a performance of a Monteverdi choral work in stunning surroundings, to a kinetic dance performance. Bitrates are of the same order of magnitude as Astra's.

Overall, the quality of these 4K satellite transmissions is superb. In the Astra clips, detail on a bird's feathering, and building textures, are delightfully pronounced, while a long shot of the Catalan city's quayside features intricate boat-rigging and individual people pottering around way off in the distance. I found that the Eutelsat clips benefitted



Sky has already conducted in-house 4K satellite trials

from a subtler colour palette, thanks no doubt to its 10-bit encoding. The shading of a cathedral roof was mesmerising, as was the sheer detail. In both cases, very little artifacting was present. By comparison, with 'net-delivered content, artifacting was more obvious on account of the lower bitrates.

Ah yes, 'net-delivered content. Famously, Netflix is streaming some material in 4K, using the same HEVC codec employed by the Astra and Eutelsat demo channels. However, another popular streaming service supported by Smart TV apps doesn't. YouTube hosts a relatively small but increasing amount of 4K content (demo footage lifted from broadcasts, movie trailers, tech-junkies trying out their 4K-capable digital cameras and smartphones...), but employs the H.264 codec. I assume it will switch to HEVC at some point.

Artifacting appears less obvious on Netflix than it does with YouTube, but neither are as pristine as the satellite feeds I accessed. YouTube 4K, in particular, can suffer from more blockiness and masking of fine detail by 'fuzz'. Of course, much YouTube content has been uploaded from lower-quality sources (recompressed satellite broadcasts, smartphones, etc) but it's clear that satellites have much higher transfer rates to play with (typically 25Mbps or more) and that's why artifacting is less noticeable.

Experimental experience

Getting access to these demo satellite channels isn't exactly straightforward, and we wouldn't expect them to be followed by a wealth of 24-hour 4K streams of fresh content – Eutelsat and Astra are both demonstrating what can be achieved, not outlining a business model.

Indeed, 4K satellite in the UK is most likely to come from one service with very deep pockets and the necessary infrastructure in place – Sky. And as noted in the box out (left), the leading satcaster is not going to be rushed. However, as these demo channels show, the technology works faultlessly, and you won't need to worry about your 'net connection. 4K via satellite? Consider us excited ■



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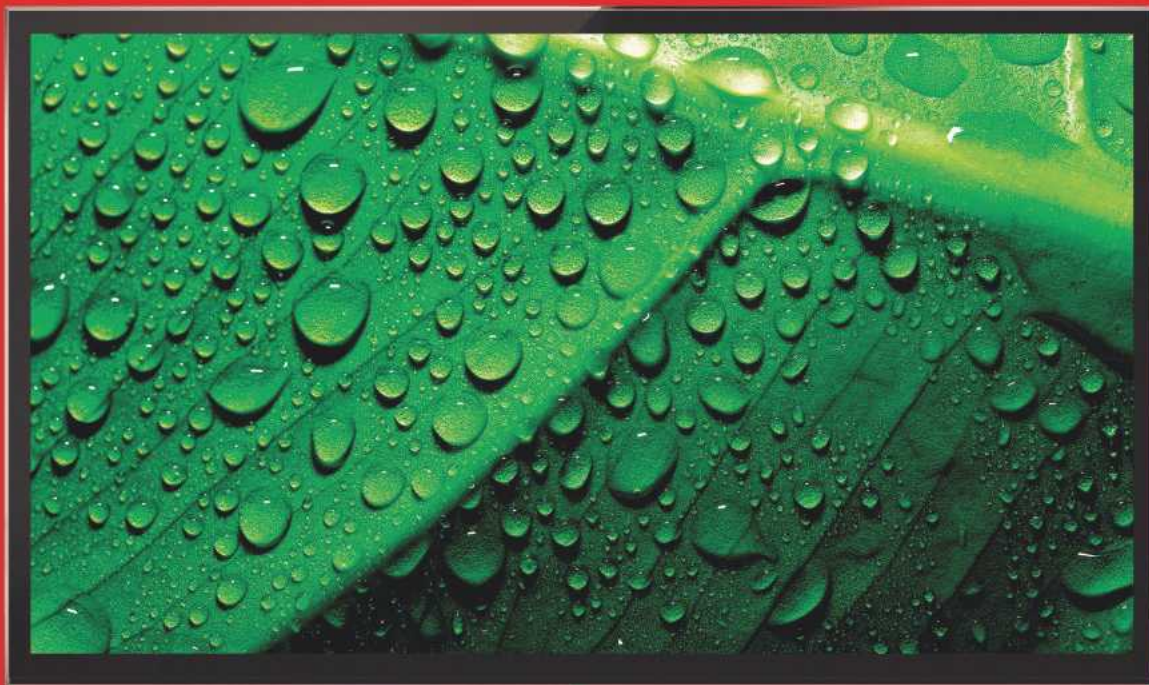


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THE 22 BEST MOVIE SEQUELS ON BLU-RAY!

Captain America: The Winter Soldier, new to Blu-ray this month, is yet more proof that not all movie sequels are inferior by definition. But what other follow-up titles are must-haves for your disc collection? Team HCC reveals all

Fast & Furious 5

The franchise that began with a fairly straightforward undercover-cop-meets-car criminals movie (think *Point Break* with accelerator pedals instead of surfboards) grew into something bigger and better with this fifth instalment. Director Justin Lin proves his action chops by staging some of the greatest movie sequences on four wheels – the final bank robbery scene is a regular *HCC* demo piece – but writer Chris Morgan perhaps deserves even greater credit for broadening the scope of the series, with the introduction of Agent Luke Hobbs (Dwayne Johnson) and time-line skewing appearance of Han showing the ideas tank wasn't running on empty.

The disc: Available on Blu-ray (either on its own or in a boxset) with a 1080p 2.40:1 transfer and insanely potent DTS-HD 5.1 mix.



The Bride of Frankenstein

A serious contender for the title of 'greatest sequel ever made,' James Whale's follow-up to his 1931 horror smash is also one of the most subversive major Hollywood flicks produced. Given free rein to cook up a sequel to Mary Shelley's classic tale, Whale concocted a brilliantly bizarre combination of the satirical, the horrific, the religious and the high-camp, packed full of indelible images – including Elsa Lanchester's lightning bolt beehive and a miniature Henry VIII kept in a bell jar (which got the film into trouble with Japanese censors for 'making a fool out of a king'). A frighteningly good example of how to make a sequel that feels as fresh as a daisy.

The disc: The restored Blu-ray is available both on its own and in the *Universal Monsters: The Essential Collection* boxset.

Predator 2

Studio heads no doubt wanted Arnold Schwarzenegger back for this extra-terrestrial sequel, but luckily someone realised it was the alien that was the franchise's real star. Danny Glover therefore fills the human hero slot in this brave follow-up, which drops the big-game hunter into the middle of a Los Angeles drug war, allowing it to showcase its stealthy splatter talents in an urban environment. Director Stephen Hopkins, unable to follow the original's suspenseful build up to the big reveal – the audience already knows what the 'predator' is – instead kicks things off at a frantic pace and rarely pauses for breath. The third-act chase sequence rivals anything we saw in the jungle...

The disc: Available either on its own or as part of a *Predator Trilogy* triple-pack. While DNR has been used on the hi-def visuals, it's not as damaging as on the first film.



Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows

Guy Ritchie and Robert Downey Jnr delivered box office gold with 2009's *Sherlock Holmes* reboot, and then hit actual storytelling gold with its sequel two years later. ...*Game of Shadows* offers a less bloated narrative, smarter interplay between Downey's Holmes and Jude Law's Watson and a climactic, well-staged finale that sees Baker Street's greatest detective plummet to certain death at the Reichenback falls, taking nemesis Moriarty with him. It's a better action flick, too – the forest escape sequence, complete with 'Little Hansel' howitzer and exploding trees, is a perennial home cinema fave.

The disc: Whether you opt for the original 'Triple Play' release, the subsequent single-disc BD or the *2-Film Collection* double-pack, you're in for a spectacular audio-visual showcase.

The good, the bad and the ugly.
We'll let you decide which is which...



Rambo

The final entry in Sly Stallone's ultra-violent but essentially anti-war franchise is an absolute blast, pulling back on some of the outright stupidity of *Rambo III* without losing any of the explosive action. Stallone once again co-writes, but also gets behind the camera, in the process proving to be adept at choreographing largescale set-pieces, a trait followed up two years later in *The Expendables*. And although *Rambo* feels far-removed stylistically from series-starter *First Blood* (and is much, much bloodier), it provides a fitting closing chapter to the tortured tale of its eponymous hero, and one that's more character-driven than you might be expecting.

The disc: A fan favourite courtesy of its brutal soundmix, those who can should import the US platter, which offers 7.1 rather than 5.1 sonics. Great extras, too.



The Exorcist III

Given the unmitigated disaster that was John Boorman's *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1980), it's unsurprising that horror fans had to wait another 13 years for a fresh instalment in the chilling series. This time around *The Exorcist* writer William Peter Blatty sat in the director's chair, filming an adaptation of his own 1983 novel *Legion*. The result was a more contemplative and restrained (but still supremely creepy) type of horror flick – albeit not quite as subdued as Blatty originally planned, thanks to the production company demanding a reshoot of the finale to include an FX-heavy exorcism. Regardless, this is a seriously underrated genre outing.

The disc: Blatty's sinister sequel is available to import on region-free Blu-ray from the US from September 23, both on its own and as part of *The Exorcist: The Complete Anthology* boxset.



Blade II

Under the stewardship of up-and-coming filmmaker Guillermo del Toro, this hyper-kinetic follow-up to the 1998 vampire-slaying comic book adaptation surpasses its predecessor with ease. The story is stronger, the monsters are freakier, the action is even more spectacular, the gore is ickier and Wesley Snipes is at his absolute coolest. Forget those insipid *Twilight* films, this is how you make a vamp movie that your home cinema setup will thank you for.

The disc: While the picture quality on Warner's Blu-ray release isn't as dazzling as bigscreen owners might hope, the awesome DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix, and the comprehensive nature of its special features, soften the blow.



Toy Story 2

It's inconceivable now, but Disney originally decided that a sequel to its 1995 mega-hit *Toy Story* would be a straight-to-video offering. Yet during the production process common sense prevailed and this revisit to the animated world of Buzz, Woody and pals was retweaked for a full theatrical outing. Remarkably, the frantic schedule appears to have worked in its favour; *Toy Story 2*'s storyline tugs at your emotional heartstrings – while serving up a ready stream of delightful gags – in a way that many better-planned 'toons simply don't.

The disc: The BD release that devotees should bag for their toy-box is the surprisingly enjoyable ret-con 3D edition – it also packs a 2D disc, of course. >



Terminator 2: Judgement Day

T2 pulls the filmic *coup de grace* of having its original baddie re-appear as its hero, thus giving Schwarzenegger another shot at the role that made him famous. Writer/director James Cameron revels in the bigger budget available, crafting a flick that's much wider in scope (and heavier on the AV thrills) than its 1984 predecessor, and still manages to magic up a time-travelling plot that kinda makes sense if you don't think too hard about it. *T2* is also the movie that heralded action/sci-fi cinema's move away from explicit violence and gore, in favour of even bigger box office receipts. If it didn't exist, the rest of your disc library just wouldn't look the same.

The disc: 2009's Skynet Edition BD includes theatrical, special edition and extended cuts, plus 6.1 DTS-HD audio.



Mad Max 2

An easy choice, this, as 'Mad' Max Rockatansky's debut in 1979 is a fine low-budget actioner, but the 1981 return is far superior. The crazy, wacky lawlessness of the near-future dystopia is ramped up to comic book proportions, giving rise to fantastic villain The Humungus and a story that ends with a hair-raising car/truck chase through the Australian outback. And Max, now stripped of his domestic trappings, becomes the death-dealing, dog-owning cinematic icon that we all know and love.

The disc: Ignore the early 2007 hi-def release, as it offers lossy Dolby Digital audio. A 2013 re-issue (also as part of a boxset) opts for DTS-HD.



The Raid 2

Rather than simply trap rookie police officer Rama (Iko Uwais) in another confined space for him to fight his way out of, in *The Raid 2* he's got an entire city to contend with. Clocking in at a whopping 150 minutes, Gareth Evans' expansive sequel mixes the no-holds-barred martial arts action of the original (albeit upped to an even bloodier level) into a sprawling crime saga about rival gangs and undercover cops. In the process it becomes one of those rare sequels that defies expectations – and we can't wait to see what Evans has in store for the planned third film.

The disc: This Blu-ray's pristine 1080p encode and bass-rich DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack ensure that you'll feel every single kick, punch and head-butt. And for extra kudos, pick up the Play.com-exclusive steelbook version.



[REC]²

Filmmakers Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza gave the 'handycam horror' subgenre a shot in the arm with their terrifying 2007 Spanish-language zombie flick *[REC]*. So what could they possibly do for an encore? Sensibly, the duo adopted an approach similar to that which James Cameron used for *Aliens* (see right) expanding the mythology of the monsters to give the story enlarged scope, and centring most of the action around a tooled-up SWAT team, ensuring plenty of action to off-set the slight drop in scares.

The disc: EntertainmentOne's UK Blu-ray serves up a surprisingly solid AV package for a 'found footage' fright flick, with the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix being particularly memorable.



The Godfather Part II

Forty years old this year, this gangster epic kickstarted Hollywood's ongoing love of sequels, no doubt inspired by its Academy Award success (including Best Picture) and rave response from critics. And all the praise it has received is entirely justified, with director Francis Ford Coppola using a shifting time-line narrative to delve so deep into the movie's Mafia world that you come out speaking Sicilian. Filmmaking on the grandest of scales.

The disc: Available as a standalone single-disc release, but surely the four-disc ...Coppola Restoration box set is an offer that you can't refuse?



Superman 2: The Richard Donner Cut

Packed with super-powered action, this enjoyable sequel to the 1978 comic book sensation was dogged by controversy when returning director Richard Donner was sacked after shooting almost three quarters of the film. Released in 2006, this re-edit gave Donner the chance to present his original vision, using alternate shots and scenes that didn't appear in the theatrical release. Not necessarily an improvement on an already great flick, but fascinating nonetheless.

The disc: It was given a (region-free) standalone hi-def release in the US, but in the UK ...*The Richard Donner Cut* is only available as part of *The Superman Motion Picture Anthology* boxset. Visually, the hi-def transfer is as good as you could hope for given the variety of different sources used to stitch it together.



Police Story 2

1985's stunt-packed actioner *Police Story* is rightfully hailed as one of Jackie Chan's very best films. Made just three years later, this first sequel picks up where the original film left off, with Chan's police officer demoted to traffic duty, only to become caught up in a terrorist plot. Cue another parade of mind-blowing action sequences and breathtaking fights that only Chan and his team could hope to pull off without (serious) injury. So even when the plot flounders, this sequel remains a must-see for adrenaline junkies.

The disc: You can pick up the first two *Police Story* films in a Region A-locked double-pack from Shout Factory in the US. Unfortunately, the set leaves a lot to be desired, offering negligible improvement in picture quality and significantly fewer extras than the old Hong Kong Legends UK DVD releases!



Jason Lives: Friday the 13th Part VI

With a new instalment arriving nearly every year in the wake of the phenomenal success of Sean S. Cunningham's 1980 slasher, by 1986 the *Friday the 13th* franchise was looking pretty played out. Enter writer-director Tom McLaughlin, who reinvigorates the franchise by giving us well-written characters (shock!) to root for and injecting the film with a self-aware style while maintaining the tension. It's rare that any film series gets as far as five sequels, and rarer still that the sixth outing is the best of the bunch – but that's definitely the case with *Jason Lives*.

The disc: Only available as part of the (region-free) *Friday the 13th: The Complete Collection* Blu-ray boxset in the US, sporting a surprisingly good 1080p encode, plus remixed DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics and plenty of extras.



Evil Dead 2

'The ultimate experience in gruelling terror,' is how Stephen King famously summed up Sam Raimi's 1981 micro-budget splatter flick *The Evil Dead*. Six years later Raimi returned to that notorious cabin in the woods to revisit the concept with a larger budget and a broader palette. Part remake, part sequel, *Evil Dead 2* proved to be a cracking mix of horror and slapstick comedy that marked out its director as one of the most inventive around, and turned its leading man Bruce Campbell into an instant cult hero.

The disc: With its more accurate colour reproduction and authentic grain structure, last year's Special Edition Blu-ray is a huge improvement on the film's original 2008 hi-def outing. It also ups the ante when it comes to extras, with a 98-minute documentary and behind-the-scenes vignettes. >

Spin-off mania!

'Connected universes' are where it's at in Hollywood



The last few months have seen a raft of announcements from most of the major American film studios that indicate a shift in thinking in terms of blockbuster content. For example, Warner Bros has revealed that it has nine movies based upon DC Comics characters hitting cinemas from 2016 (beginning with *Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice*) to 2020. Warner's statement followed in the wake of Sony Pictures co-chairman Amy Pascal committing to releasing a Spider-Man movie (or, more accurately, one set in the Spider-Man 'universe') 'every year', and Disney thrilling/boring film fans by outlining plans to not only make three more *Star Wars* films, but spin-off entries, too. Meanwhile, Universal Studios, seemingly desperate not to be left out, is planning to dust off the cobwebs from its 'classic monsters' vault and put the likes of *The Mummy*, *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man* and *Dracula* into a connected universe.



And then there's Marvel Studios. After an inauspicious beginning where it licensed its characters to other studios, Marvel took control of its own destiny and built up a multi-billion-dollar franchise where the likes of Captain America, Iron Man and Thor join forces or go-solo in movies every year. It would have even more franchise fodder to play with if it hadn't endowed 20th Century Fox with the rights to the X-Men and Fantastic Four; with the studio keeping the former franchise running for nearly 15 years, including spin-offs and prequels.

Aliens

A second entry for James Cameron, *Aliens* takes the stomach-churning horror of the first film as the starting point for something much more action-oriented, in-yr-face and, well... '80s. Not better than the original, but different enough to demand your attention, and it's the film where Sigourney Weaver's character Ripley fully develops into an ass-kicking heroine, clearing the way for a whole new era of feisty females in Hollywood.

The disc: Fox's *Alien Anthology* boxset bundles *Aliens* together with the three other franchise entries. Tons of extras, and the James Cameron-approved HD transfer is much different to the DVD version.



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AV Forums 'Highly Recommended',
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Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back

'Luke, I am your Father.' With those five words, *The Empire Strikes Back* turns the *Star Wars* franchise on its head. Suddenly, you're not just watching a jolly space adventure about a blond-haired naif and his robot chums, you're plunged into a layered, operatic saga where there's obviously more going on than meets the eye, and the film closes with its hero having lost a hand and another leading character frozen in carbonite. Audacious moves from George Lucas and his writing team, which set up the trilogy finale perfectly.

The disc: A tweaked version of the 1997 Special Edition can be found in both *The Original Trilogy* and *The Complete Saga* Blu-ray boxsets. Rumours also persist that a BD release of the 1980 incarnation is on the cards.



Ghost in the Shell: Innocence

As much as we enjoyed the 1995 anime adaptation of Masamune Shirow's acclaimed comic, there was no getting away from the fact that it sacrificed some of the psychological depth of the source material in favour of sci-fi action scenes. This 2004 sequel remedies the situation, with writer-director Mamoru Oshii crafting a hard-boiled sci-fi police procedural that weaves elements of Confucius, Plato and the Bible into its plot about rogue sex 'bots. Add to this the staggering beauty of the animation and you have a film that is a treat for both your eyes and your grey matter.

The disc: The film's astounding visual beauty is exceptionally well-served by Manga's UK BD platter.

The Bourne Ultimatum

This series of spy-adventure films based on the novels by Robert Ludlum defied convention by improving with every instalment (discounting 2012's Matt Damon-less *The Bourne Legacy*, although that's not a bad effort either). Directed by Paul Greengrass, the brilliant third entry, *Bourne Ultimatum*, is a finely-tuned thrill-ride that sees Damon's espionage agent finally coming face-to-face with the government suits responsible for tinkering with his brain. The result is a shining example of how to do a smart, action-packed blockbuster, and the Oscar-grabbing sound design is exemplary.

The disc: Universal's polished Blu-ray release delivers a crisp 1080p VC-1 encode alongside its stunning DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. The disc is available as a standalone release and as part of two *Bourne*... movie boxsets.



They don't boldly go where no film has gone before, but all three of these sequels improve on their predecessors

Star Trek 2: The Wrath of Khan

After the ponderous *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, the sci-fi franchise really needed to get up to warp factor 14 in its next outing if it wasn't going to go the way of the TV series. 1982's ...*The Wrath of Khan* did exactly that, dazzling audiences with its intriguing battle of wills between Captain James T. Kirk and the genetically-engineered Khan Noonien Singh. And who can forget the shocking finale? A scene that is still capable of reducing Trekkies to tears...

The disc: ...*The Wrath of Khan* boasts the best hi-def transfer out of any of Paramount's original *Star Trek* movie Blu-rays (well, it was the only one remastered from the original negative), plus a nuanced DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 remixed soundtrack and a stellar collection of extras. Beam it up now! ■



Shabby chic cinema hides sonic secrets

This relaxed-looking space proves it's possible to incorporate high-end 7.2-channel audio and largescale visuals without losing a room's original character. **Mark Craven** reports



THIS SPACIOUS, UNCLUTTERED cinema is the work of London-based M.E.G.A AV Installations, and just one part of a mammoth project that saw the company overhauling a five-building property in France.

While much of the company's work involved adding music playback and touchpanel control throughout, it was tasked with turning an old timber and stone summerhouse into a movie room. The brief included the 'biggest screen we could comfortably fit,' says installer Zak Vracevic, and to keep as much as possible of the room's original charm.

The answer was to think outside of the box (or, rather, inside the box) when it came to speakers. With no option to mount surround cabinets onto the room's walls, they were ear-marked for ceiling placement. 'But even that was not easy,' reveals Vracevic. 'The old timber is also the attic floor upstairs so we could not cut out holes and set speakers into the ceiling. Instead we made MDF boxes, filled with high density rockwool, and mounted Sonance SUR.5S speakers inside.' These were then suspended using steel rods, and decorated to become almost invisible.

The front wall, which houses the LCR soundstage, twin subwoofers and 150in fixed-frame projector screen, is also an exercise in neat design, leaving nothing but the HD visuals on show. Currently, a Panasonic PT-AT6000E projector is resident (ceiling-mounted at the rear of the room), although the owner has an eye on a later upgrade. With that in mind, the acoustically-transparent screen material chosen is Screen Excellence's Enlightor 4K, certified by the ISF as ideal for

higher-resolution setups. On the audio side, an Onkyo PR-SC5509 processor and power amp drive the full Sonance array, in conjunction with Chord speaker cable. Control is via a URC touchscreen remote with one-button macros.

Sound to suit

In order to maintain the aesthetic appeal of the room, limited sonic treatments have been employed. Two of the stone walls with windows were lined with blackout curtains with acoustic damping properties, and the

'The front wall, which houses the LCR soundstage, twin subs and 150in screen, is an exercise in neat design'

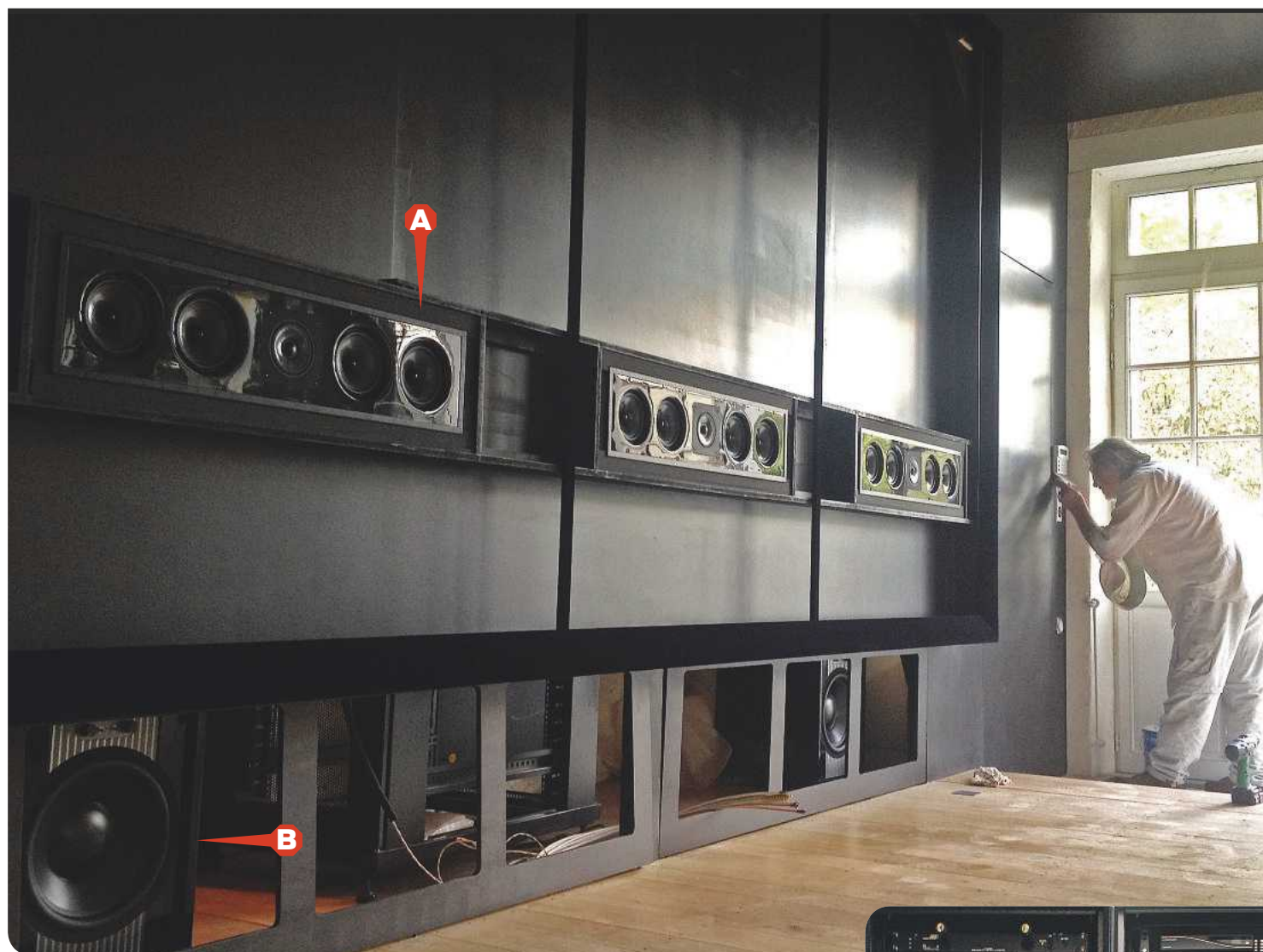
Philippe Starck sofas and chairs also help absorb some stray low frequencies. However, the installer reveals the shape of the room itself helped. 'The timber ceiling with its exposed joists, and uneven stone walls, act as primitive diffusers. And, thanks to the age of the building, no walls are parallel!' A full room EQ was naturally completed to fine-tune the performance, and having the cinema room in a completely separate building in the garden meant noise isolation wasn't a concern.

While the audiophile owner loves the whole-house speaker array – which includes no fewer than 26 KEF in-ceiling speakers – we're told the cinema room has become his new favourite space. You don't say... ➤

KIT CHECKLIST

SCREEN EXCELLENCE: 150in Enlightor 4K acoustically-transparent screen
ONKYO: PR-SC5509 surround processor; Onkyo PA-MC5501 nine-channel power amp
PANASONIC: PT-AT6000E LCD projector
DENON: DBT-3313 Blu-ray player
DREAMBOX: DM800 satellite set-top box
SONANCE: 3 x Cinema Series LCR2; 4 x Cinema Series SUR.5S; 2 x SUB 12-250 12in subwoofers
URC: MRX-1; MX5000 remote control
CISCO: 24-way Ethernet switch
CHORD: Speaker cables and high-speed HDMI cables





INSTALL INFO

A SONANCE SPEAKERS

The room uses a 7.2 system from Sonance. These LCR2 models pack a quartet of 5.25in bass drivers flanking a co-axial 4in mid-range/1in dome tweeter arrangement

B BATTILING WITH BASS

The dual 12in subwoofers caused a minor headache, in the form of building vibrations. 'It took us a while to identify what parts were rumbling but our carpenter managed to put it all under control with a box of screws and some bits of timber...'

C TAKING CONTROL

A programmed macro on the high-end URC MX-5000 touchscreen remotes fires up the projector, processor, amp and sources

D SMALLSCREEN OPTION

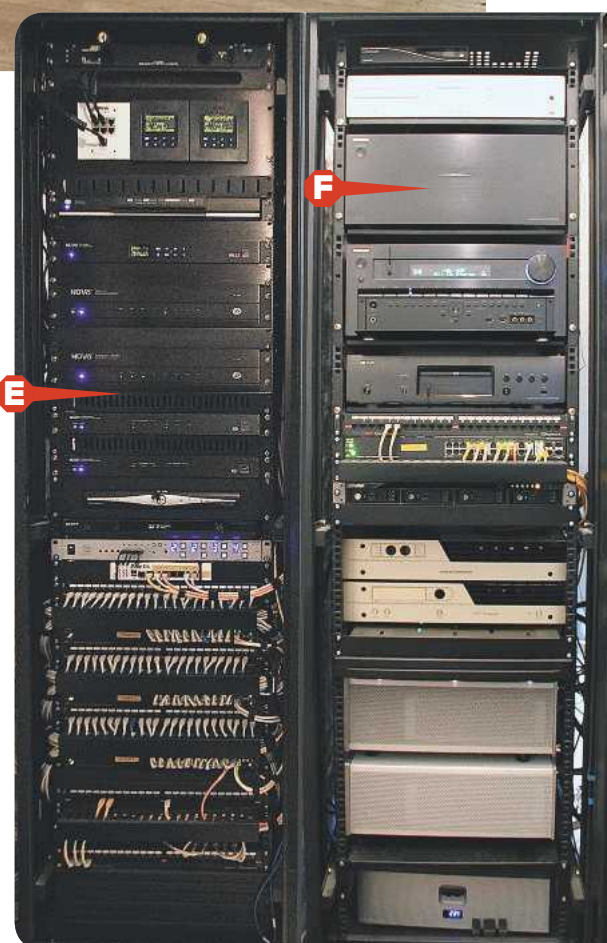
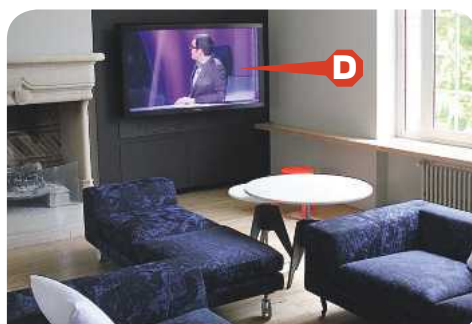
Elsewhere in the property, the owner can relax in front of a 65in plasma, married to a Yamaha soundbar. And all the bedrooms are pre-wired for standard/IPTV

E DOUBLE RACKS

The kit cupboard houses all the control electronics and audio processing for both the cinema and the whole-house music/network distribution

F POWER RANGER

Onkyo's PA-MC5501 amp provides nine channels of THX-certified power





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REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **YAMAHA** Atmos-ready 9.2-channel AVR flagship **SONY** Second-tier 55in 4K flatscreen & range-topping Blu-ray deck **BANG & OLUFSEN** Premium-grade 4K TV with motorised control **PARADIGM** High-end soundbar **MARANTZ** Living room-friendly streaming amp **SAMSUNG** Series 7 4K LED TV **DEVOLO** High-speed Powerline solution **AND MORE!**



Budget beauty

Optoma's HD50 projector offers a startling performance considering its £1,000 ticket. See p50 for our review

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

42 YAMAHA RX-A3040 → Approx £2,000



The RX-A3040 will make a formidable addition to your kit rack

Yamaha's RX-A3040 is a technical *tour de force*. **Ed Selley** loves it for simpler reasons

A fuss-free flagship

DOLBY ATMOS IS upon us. After a hiatus of several years where the decoding side of AV receivers has remained effectively static, there is now a creditable sonic reason to look at upgrading your current power pusher. Well, sort of. While the usual suspects have released their hardware, at the time of writing, software remains an unknown quantity. Demos have been impressive, but we don't yet know exactly what we'll get in terms of media.

Still, of all the companies that have released Atmos products in the first wave, Yamaha might be the company that minds this media gap the least. Like a gently smug hipster, Yamaha was doing speakers 'up top' long before it was cool and this has two implications for how the company goes about Atmos – when the format is added by firmware update.

The first is that the flagship RX-A3040 auditioned here has the standard wealth of DSP options on board that should allow you to get some use out of your newly-rigged speakers (in-ceiling ones, certainly) with 'normal' Blu-rays in the absence of Atmos platters. The second is that as Yamaha has been building these additional channels into its amplifiers for years, the RX-A3040 is not a radical departure in terms of layout or design from the preceding RX-A3030. Put a picture of their rear panels next to each other and you'd be hard pressed to tell one from the other.

A chip off the old block

This is in part a reflection that the RX-A3030 did most things you could reasonably expect an AV receiver to do already. As such, with this successor, you get nine channels of grunt (with processing for eleven), twin subwoofer outputs, eight 4K-capable HDMI inputs (supporting 4:4:4 colour sampling but not HDCP 2.2 copy protection) and two outputs.

Then there is the expected overload of legacy connections (including the ubiquitous phono stage for that minute intersection of a Venn diagram where bleeding-edge cinephiles meet retro audiophiles), and support for the regular lossless surround formats (Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio) that we've made use of up until now. Perhaps the only feature you might expect at this price point that's missing is an asynchronous USB input, but given that the RX-A3040 can stream lossless and high-res formats via UPnP, this isn't the end of the world.

The RX-A3040 is part of Yamaha's Aventure line of products, high-end slabs of hardware that focus on audio performance as well as gut-churning film soundtrack reproduction. To this end, the construction shares a number of design points with premium stereo components, including symmetrical layout of the amplification and selection of specialist components for given roles in the receiver. Furthermore, Yamaha's devotion to its 'Total Purity' concept extends to adding a central fifth foot to minimise the effect of internal and external vibration.

The Aventure spec extends to the AVR's styling, which is handsome in a slightly brutish sort of way. I can't be the only person that laments the passing of the orange display that used to denote Yamaha products at a glance [*erm, you probably are – Ed*] but the

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
9.2-channel
Atmos-ready AVR

POSITION:
Flagship AV receiver
and part of the
Aventure line

PEERS:
Onkyo TX-NR3030,
Denon AVR-
X5200W;
Pioneer SC-LX88

RX-A3040 is unlikely to scare the horses in a domestic situation and the fit and finish is up to the standards expected at the £2,000 mark.

This is not to say that the RX-A3040 doesn't bring anything new to the table. One of those blink-and-you'll-miss-it alterations to the back panel is a wireless aerial connection. This liberates the network features of the Yamaha – including Spotify Connect, AirPlay, internet radio and the control app – from any need to be close to a router or Ethernet socket.

'Where the Yamaha excels is that it can convey tremendous energy without breaking sweat'

Having wrestled with adapters and cables in receivers up to this point, the ten-second WPS button sync of the Yamaha to park it on my network was a little moment of joy.

Setup as a whole is a pretty fuss-free affair. Everything from the layout of connections on the rear to the onscreen menus is logical and easy to follow. Yamaha continues to use its proprietary YPAO automatic calibration system, aided by a microphone and three-position 'boomerang' stand. This produced some entirely logical and consistent results in my AV room and the settings can be easily tweaked manually afterwards to better suit your preferences. Input allocation is logical enough, and while the supplied remote handset is fairly crammed and not backlit, it is easy to use and the major functions are sensibly arranged.

The control app is a good option for those who always have a smart device (preferably a tablet) to hand in their viewing room. It's a very well laid-out, fast and logical piece of software. As well as input selection, volume adjustment and choosing of preset DSP modes, you can carry out fine adjustment to the settings via an attractive GUI. The app also allows for access of the UPhP streamer module and internet radio settings. It's intuitive enough to be the main point of control of the receiver and not just an interesting gimmick.

Savouring regular Blu-rays

With no Atmos material available at the time of review, I had to treat the RX-A3040 as a normal AV amp. This might sound a little anticlimactic, but it's realistically how the Yamaha is likely to be used for some time unless you rejoice in watching the same films over and over again.

Connected firstly to a set of Mordaunt Short Mezzos and latterly a quintet of Neat Motive SX speakers, the Yamaha showed from the outset that it is considerably more than a vast

collection of inputs held together by a heavy, black box.

With *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Blu-ray), the Yamaha is effortlessly and at times awesomely capable. The claimed output of 150W per channel almost certainly dips under load but it doesn't prevent the RX-A3040 from handling Helicarriers plummeting from the sky with a rock-solid sense of scale and energy. Where the Yamaha excels is that while it can convey tremendous energy without breaking sweat, it never sounds hard or strained. The result is an epic demonstration of scale and immersion, bouncing along atop a torrent of fluid power.

In many ways, though, it is when you stop asking it to do explosions and showcase a bit of subtlety that this amp truly shines. The RX-A3040 can take almost any soundtrack you like, however subdued, and find the nuances and details required to make it sound completely believable. The pared-back sonics of *Drive* (BD) are turned into a spellbindingly enthralling sphere of sound. At no stage does the Yamaha's presentation become overblown or exaggerated, and even at late-night listening levels the performance remains convincing.

This all comes with the AVR's DSP modes untouched. However, while I've never been

entirely swayed by Yamaha's DSP adventures (generally, the only thing I want to sound like a concert hall in Munich is a concert hall in Munich) there is little arguing that the RX-A3040's processing horsepower is used to tremendous effect outside of the fixed modes. Tweaking these via the app can yield small but worthwhile boosts with material too, although like all these systems it is a little too easy to spend more time fiddling than actually enjoying your big-ticket purchase.

Turn everything off and use the Yamaha like a 21st-century music centre, with high-res FLAC streamed directly to it and running in Pure Direct Mode, and its performance is genuinely delightful. Sure, like most AV receivers, the Yamaha can sound a bit big and obvious, but while I started to listen to the RX-A3040 out of reviewer's obligation, I continued to listen to it because it sounds continually enjoyable and because the control app makes doing so a breeze. Perhaps my only concern on this front is that the Spotify Connect function, while reassuringly stable, is mysteriously loud compared to other sources.

The receiver's performance with broadcast TV shows most of the same positive attributes that it does with Blu-ray, albeit with an understandable drop in outright quality from

Connectivity, both analogue and digital, is extensive

For some reason, Yamaha's handset isn't backlit





The pull-down flap hides inputs and various controls

the change in sound formats. The same marriage of smooth delivery and sumptuous detail that the Yamaha can generate with movies helps decent TV material (think *Game of Thrones* rather than game shows) to sound equally compelling; the RX-A3040 brings a welcome touch of the cinematic to an evening's entertainment.

At my pickiest I would be say that this amp tends to send too much information to the centre speaker when post-processing a stereo track into Pro-Logic IIx, but this doesn't generally effect the intelligibility of the

soundscape. I also found that my review sample would not be persuaded to auto detect an Audio Return Channel (via HDMI) and it had to be assigned to another input. These niggles aren't major, and represent pretty much the only dropped notes in an otherwise pitch-perfect performance.

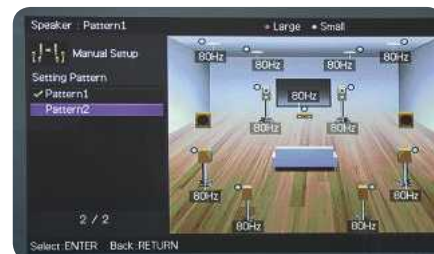
Logical progression

The consistency of the Yamaha heavyweight makes it a rewarding product, and I have no doubt, given how well it performs with my normal array, that its Atmos performance will be competitive with similarly-priced rivals. However, what may give the Yamaha an edge in the £2,000 AVR fight is just how well thought out the RX-A3040 is. It is flexible in terms of supported features and, importantly, using them is straightforward. At every point from installation to use of the more esoteric processing functions, the RX-A3040 is logical, well executed and for the most part stunningly capable.

Like every AV enthusiast, I want Atmos to be a big deal with plenty of software and hardware. What you see here is an AVR that is equipped to take advantage of this best-case scenario but good enough to be an excellent purchase even if Atmos isn't on your radar ■



ON THE MENU



→ Yamaha's user interface is simple to navigate, despite the level of setup complexity on offer. Some neat graphical touches make it a more enjoyable experience than many budget amps

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes. Plus Dolby Atmos (via forthcoming firmware update), Dolby Digital EX, Pro-Logic IIx

DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes. Plus DTS-ES/EX/24/96/Neo 6
THX: No

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: Yes. 7.1-channel
MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 9 x 150W (eight ohms, two channels driven, 0.06% THD)

MULTIROOM: Yes. 3 zones

AV INPUTS: Yes. 5 x composite; 6 x digital audio (3 x optical and 3 x coaxial)

HDMI: 8 x inputs, 2 x outputs, v2.0

VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K

COMPONENT VIDEO: 3 x inputs, 1 x output

DIMENSIONS: 435(w) x 192(h) x 467(d)mm

WEIGHT: 19.6kg

ALSO FEATURING: YPAO multi-point automatic calibration; integrated Wi-Fi; optional Bluetooth; compatible with Yamaha's AV Controller app (iOS/Android); AirPlay, Spotify Connect, Napster, Rhapsody and internet radio; 23 DSP modes; dialogue lift function; Pure Direct mode; Compressed Music Enhancer; High-Resolution Music Enhancer; ESS SABRE32 Ultra DAC for seven main channels; 4K passthrough to 60p; 11.2-channel pre-outs; MHL support; USB input; Avenge/Total Purity construction

HCC VERDICT



Yamaha RX-A3040

→ £2,000 Approx → uk.yamaha.com

→ Tel: 0844 811 1116

HIGHS: Wonderfully powerful and immersive sound; solid build quality; excellent feature set and control app; 11.2-channel processing

LOWS: No asynchronous USB or backlit remote; some minor function gripes; Bluetooth still an optional extra

Performance ★★★★★

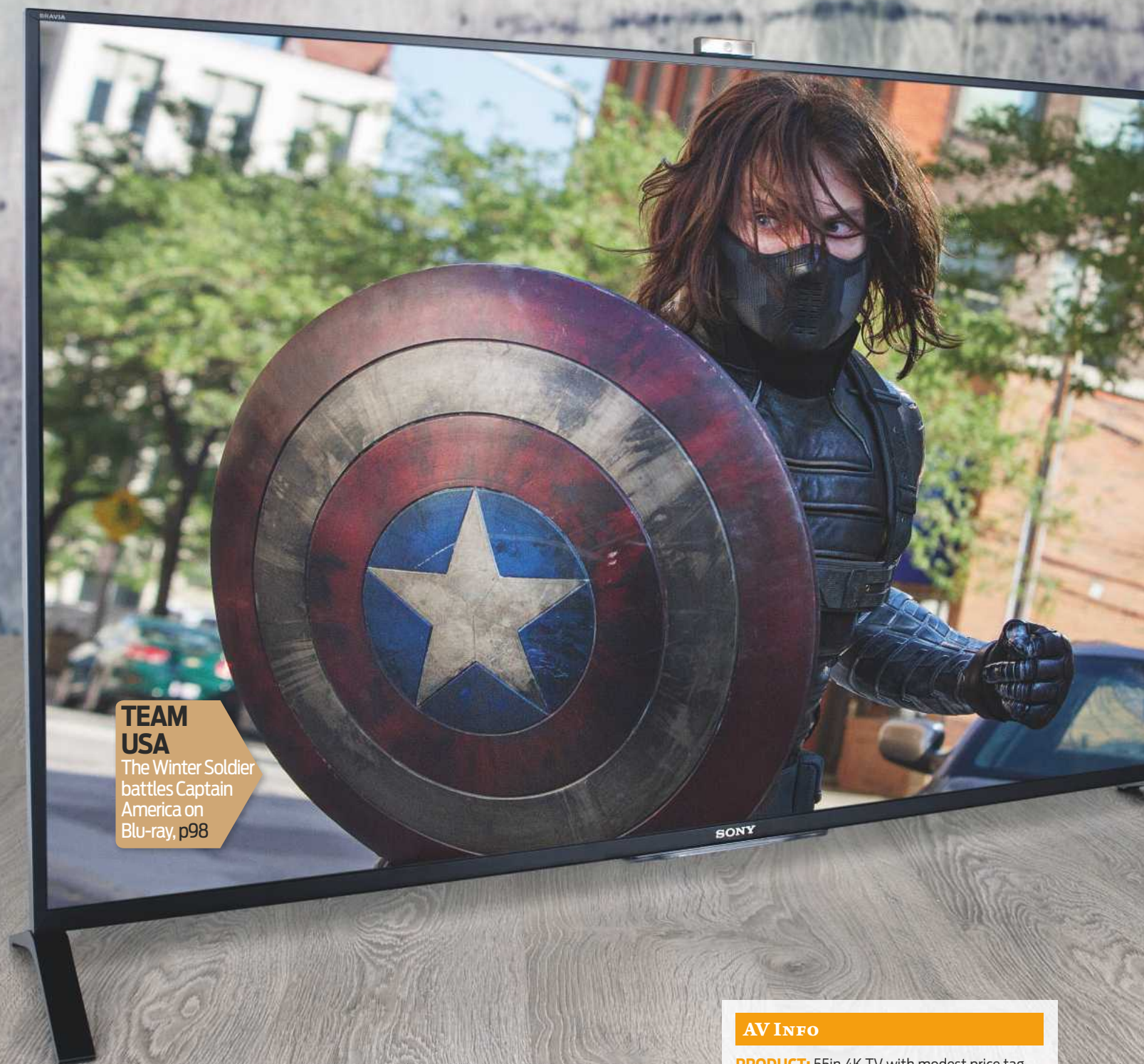
Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

46 SONY KD-55X8505 → Approx £2,000

For its step-down 4K series, Sony has dropped the front-firing speakers and Wedge cabinet



TEAM USA

The Winter Soldier battles Captain America on Blu-ray, p98

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 55in 4K TV with modest price tag

POSITION: A rung down from Sony's X9005B models. Below this sit Full HD sets

PEERS: Samsung UE55HU7500; Sony KD-65X9005B



The built-in camera here isn't a pop-up design

Bane in the tunnels beneath Gotham in *The Dark Knight Rises* lacks serious punch [nice pun – Ed]. There's a grey mist that no amount of backlight reduction or dynamic contrast action can remove. At least consistently.

For that's the other problem. The extremes the 55X8505 has to go to with its dimming and luminance adjustments to fight against its low-contrast core can cause frustrating brightness jumps and shifting patches of backlight clouding.

It's not completely incapable of delivering a convincing black colour, however. With a really dark shot it works better than any other IPS-based TV I've seen this year. But as soon as any significant light enters the frame the greyness level and backlight clouding ramp up alarmingly.

'Upscaled HD, which will still make up the majority of your viewing time, is handled majestically'

The problem is especially egregious when watching films with aspect ratios wider than 1.85:1. Which happens quite a lot, actually.

These issues are much less obvious if you're watching in a bright room. And you don't have to worry about them if you're watching consistently bright, colourful content. However, if you routinely darken your movie room when spinning a Blu-ray, and those discs routinely contain a few dark sequences, then you'll sometimes find yourself watching the backlight engine more than you're watching the film. Disappointing.

Clever light management

In most other ways the 55X8505 displays all the hallmarks of Sony's excellent imaging engine. Colours are terrific, with a wonderful Triluminos-inspired richness joined by immaculate subtlety. Even more impressive is the way the TV serves up healthy amounts of shadow detail in dark scenes despite the black level problems. It's better in this regard than its rivals, proving just how clever Sony's core light

management is. If only this light management was being applied to a less contrast-compromised panel...

Native 4K feeds look detailed and crisp too; 4K is more than capable of blowing HD out of the water even at the relatively small 55in screen level. There's a greater sense of depth and object solidity thanks to the 4K resolution, making even 2D images feel a bit 3D.

Upscaled HD, which will make up the majority of your viewing time while we wait for more native 4K sources, is handled majestically. The Sony conjures a sense of improved sharpness and pixel density without generating irksome extra noise.

Motion handling is also top-notch, managing to remove almost all blur and judder using the 55X8505's Clear setting without generating any significant side effects. This is great news for native 4K content in particular.

Firing up *Thor* in passive 3D, the reduction in resolution from native and even upscaled HD feels more noticeable than I would have expected, actually. Fortunately the stereoscopic images are bulletproof where crosstalk ghosting and flicker are concerned, and enjoy vivid colours and bold brightness levels. However, since the panel is run brightly for maximum 3D impact, you can see more signs of the TV's backlight foibles during dark 3D scenes, such as when the scientists drive into the desert to investigate the light phenomenon that precedes Thor's arrival.

Not surprisingly the super-skinny 55X8505's sonic abilities fall well short of the incredible efforts of the X9005B series. There isn't much bass, leaving the soundstage rather thin and harsh during action scenes. Male voices sound rather forced and boxy, too. The set can hit serious volumes without distorting or rattling though, and its Cinema audio setting did actually manage to steer some effects behind me in my viewing room, as well as offering an expansive front soundstage.

With its aggressive price and relatively manageable dimensions, I wanted to love the 55X8505. And for much of the time it is quite lovable, with bright, colourful, and stunningly detailed pictures. But unfortunately even Sony's best picture processing efforts can't disguise the fundamental contrast flaws at the TV's heart ■

ON THE MENU



→ One of Sony's Smart TV strengths is its exclusive Video Unlimited service, which packs a decent selection of new movie releases available to buy in HD

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Passive
4K/ULTRA HD: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160
TUNER: Yes. Freeview HD x 2; DVB-S2
CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; 3 x USB; component video input; composite video input; Scart input; integrated Wi-Fi; Ethernet; subwoofer output; optical digital audio output; analogue audio input; headphone output
SOUND: 20W
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A
CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): N/A
DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,232(w) x 741(h) x 66(d)mm
WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 23.5kg
FEATURES: 4K X-Reality PRO processing; Triluminos colour; IPS panel; multimedia playback via USB and DLNA; Twitter tracker; Sony Entertainment Network portal; BBC iPlayer/Demand 5 catch-up; MotionFlow XR 200Hz; Advanced Contrast Enhancer; numerous picture presets including Cinema1, Cinema2, Vivid and Standard

HCC VERDICT



Sony KD-55X8505

→ £2,000 Approx → www.sony.co.uk
 → Tel: 020 7365 2413

HIGHS: Gorgeously detailed, richly coloured images; slim design; attractive price; clean 3D
LOWS: Below-par native contrast; contrast-boosting tools can distract; slightly soft 3D; average audio performance

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

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Optoma's compact HD50 offers stunning Full HD images without breaking the bank. **Steve May** is seriously impressed

True home theatre for less

THE HD50 IS the latest iteration of Optoma's compact Full HD home entertainment projector line. It looks not unlike its HD30 forebear, but features a host of improvements. Home cinema fans ready to embrace bigscreen projection for the first time, or updating an older model, will find it represents quite extraordinary value for money.

Unboxed, the HD50 is surprisingly small at just 286mm wide; it's a dumpy design with a large lens set offside to the right of a forward-facing exhaust. The latter really throws out an inordinate amount of hot air. Indeed, the cabinet is designed to vent as much as possible, which makes it rather light intrusive. When up and running in a darkened room, the chassis borders on transparent, leaking white light every which way.

On the plus side, the projector is small enough to keep in a cupboard and get out when you want a white-wall screening. Similarly, when ceiling-mounted it doesn't bring too much attention to itself, and weighing just 3.8kg, it's not a challenging model to mount. Size-wise it's ideal for the average living room.

Positioned above the lens assembly are zoom and lens shift adjustment wheels. Optional menu navigation and source selection controls sit nearby on top of the cabinet.

Connectivity is restricted to the rear. Here you'll find two HDMI inputs (with MHL support for smartphones), plus component and composite video inputs, as well as VGA, RS232, a 12V trigger and 3D sync out. The HD50 is compatible with Optoma's ZF2100 144Hz refresh rate Active Shutter 3D system, which is a £90 optional extra, although this wasn't supplied for review.

The provision of a 12V trigger means that this model can be easily integrated into an automated projection system with drop-down

electric screen. The HD50 also supports HDMI CEC control.

Hectic handset

The remote control, finished in a matching white, is tastefully backlit in blue, but goes a tad overboard on the buttonry. There's a bunch of keys dedicated to gamma, brightness, contrast, input source selection and colour temperature. You can even shortcut to the projector's colour management system, as well as dial up the



various Display Mode image presets. Some may find this more convenient than having to delve through the various menus, but casual users may balk at the complexity.

Installation isn't taxing. There's a 1.5x manual zoom, (improving on the 1.2x of the HD30) plus vertical lens shift to manoeuvre your picture into position. From just over two metres you can cast an 120in image.

The handset offers in-depth control

The Optoma claims a brightness of 2,200 Lumens, although it's not as useful as you might think in rooms lit with some ambient light, quickly losing contrast and black level, even with the Bright preset engaged. It works best in a light-controlled environment.

Revamped interface

The HD50's predecessor, the HD30, was a fine video performer let down somewhat by a sluggish, irritating user interface. Optoma has addressed that here, introducing an all-new OSD which is clean and responsive. It tabs down into Image, Display, System and Setup sections, and proves intuitive to use. It's a major improvement.

Image quality borders on the sensational. Hi-def content is displayed with ruthless efficiency (always a DLP trait) and colours pop with deep, luscious fidelity. The rebooted *Total Recall* (Blu-ray) has a fabulously rich colour palette, and the HD50 has a field day with all the *Bladerunner*-inspired neon-lit streets and cityscapes. Even after a diet of 4K projection, this Optoma still impresses.

A PureEngine image processing suite offers an UltraDetail mode. Interestingly, while effective, this doesn't induce unwanted ringing. It's pleasingly benign. There's also PureMotion image interpolation. This has Off, Low, Medium and High settings, but doesn't behave as you might expect.

The effect of the PureMotion processing is limited to controlling motion blur. One thing it doesn't do is improve motion resolution. I measured the mode Off, Low, Medium and High and found negligible improvements; at 6.5ppf (pixels per frame) perceived resolution remains around 700 lines across the board. The setting does, however, impart an icy soap-opera motion to proceedings, which gets incrementally more disturbing. Set on Medium and High, overt motion artefacts can be spotted around certain moving objects, as horizontal pans get smoother. I would only

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Full HD projector
that hits the £1,000
price point

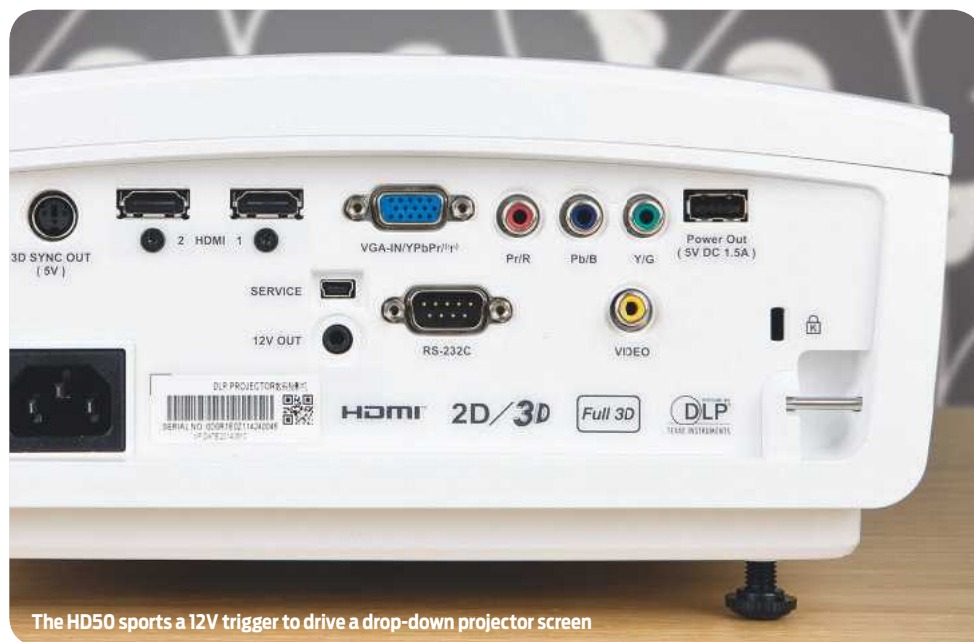
POSITIONING:
One of a number
of new PJs from
Optoma, above
the HD26

PEERS:
Epson EH-TW5200;
Vivitek H1185HD



'Movie fans ready to embrace a projector for the first time will find this offers great value for money'





The HD50 sports a 12V trigger to drive a drop-down projector screen

advise its use on Low, where it proves less distracting. The overarching effects of PureEngine can be demonstrated with a split screen effect, either vertical or horizontal.

While the projector doesn't offer stygian blacks, contrast, rated at 50,000:1, looks excellent. *Total Recall*'s monochromatic robotic police are on point – there's no sense that these droids are grey-tinged. The Optoma successfully reveals shadow detail, and

'The clarity and cinematic nature of its HD images challenges rivals costing a good deal more'

gradations are pleasingly smooth. For die-hard tweekers there are variable gamma settings, for film, video and graphics, which offer minor adjustment.

Optoma's Dynamic Black setting can be used to optimise black levels depending on image content by adjusting the lamp output, but this causes the projector's cooling fan to oscillate in a quite audible manor, making it a tad distracting. Any black level gains aren't worth the irritation. Purely as an aside, it's worth noting that the black levels achieved in many commercial cinemas these days are far from deep, thanks to growing levels of light pollution during screenings, often caused by permanently illuminated house lights and glowing exit signs. So all things considered, this Optoma acquits itself rather well.

Uma Thurman's burial in *Kill Bill: Volume 2* reveals just the right amount of incomprehensible shadow movement, springing into dramatic monochrome when

she lights her torch. It's an almost impossibly dark and difficult sequence to reproduce correctly, but the Optoma tries valiantly to depict it. Overall, I rate its black level performance tight and crisp enough.

Far more significant, that old DLP chestnut of rainbow fringing in areas of high contrast has all but been eliminated.

Oblivion, always a beautiful bigscreen Blu-ray demo disc, is artifact-free and big on texture. Although flat, at times image depth seems positively three dimensional. This precision throws set design and visual effects into an admiring light. The image onscreen looks far more upmarket than the unit's ticket price might suggest. This really is a very enjoyable projector to watch.

The HD50 does a fine job with HD TV as well, revealing tiny details in the opening animated sequence of *Game of Thrones* (Sky Atlantic HD) that I've not noticed before. The intricate details in the models, the glint on metal, are all quite extraordinary.

On the debit side, the hot-running, air-shifting nature means it's not the quietest model on the catwalk. As standard you should have the lamp set on Eco, but that still emits a 29dB thrum. Opting for Bright doesn't significantly affect perceived light output, yet raises operating noise quite dramatically. In Eco mode, Optoma suggests the lamp has a working life of around 5,000 hours.

Playing with the big boys

Overall, the Optoma HD50 can be considered remarkable value. It's the best £1,000-and-below projector I've seen this year, with the clarity and cinematic nature of its images challenging rivals costing a good deal more. Add in a compact, easy to live with design and provision for screen control via 12V trigger, and you have a proposition that's difficult to beat ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active Shutter (no glasses or emitter supplied)

4K/ULTRA HD: No. 1,920 x 1,080

CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI; component; composite; VGA; RS232; 3D sync emitter; 12V trigger

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 2,200 ANSI Lumens

CONTRAST (CLAIMED): 50,000:1

DIMENSIONS: 286(w) x 266(d) x 124(h)mm

WEIGHT: 3.8kg

FEATURES: Single-chip DLP; Eco mode; vertical lens shift; vertical keystone correction; PureEngine picture processor; Dynamic Black technology; PureMotion technology; 5,000 hours lamp life claimed in Eco mode; 29dB fan noise (Eco mode); Cinema, Reference, Vivid, Bright, Game, 3D and User presets; 1.39-2.09:1 throw ratio; 1.5x optical zoom; 2D-3D conversion; UltraDetail; HDMI Link (CEC); 230W (Eco mode) power consumption; colour management system

HCC VERDICT



Optoma HD50

→ £1,000 Approx → www.optoma.co.uk

→ Tel: 01923 691 80

HIGHS: Superb HD image performance; no overt rainbow fringing; 12V trigger; compact design

LOWS: Relatively noisy in Eco mode; excessive light leakage; 3D an optional extra

Performance ★★★★★

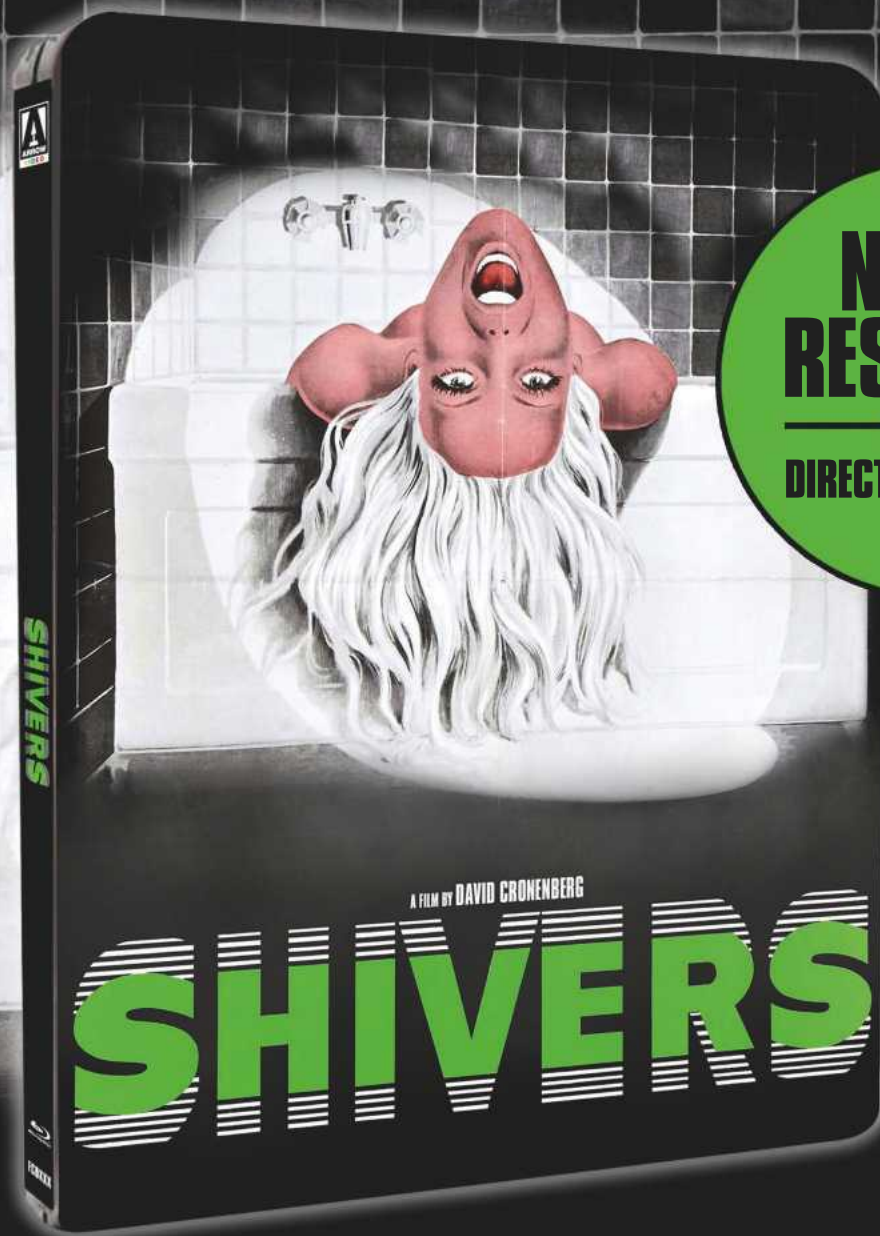
Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



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Marantz has imbued its slim-line AVR with Wi-Fi and improved connectivity. **Steve May** gets all hooked up

Space-saving surround sound

THE NR1605 IS the latest update to Marantz's increasingly popular slinky AV receiver line. With sales of traditional home cinema amps shrinking faster than the crown jewels of a skinny-dipping Inuit, AV brands have been looking for ways to curry favour with disenchanted cinemaniacs. One solution is to add Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, the other is to embrace a leaner form factor. Here Marantz has done both.

The drive for user-friendliness extends to a simplified handset



A cursory glance might suggest there's not much else to separate this model from its NR1604 predecessor. The chubby-cheeked Marantz cosmetics seem unchanged, matching other separates from the brand. But there are now seven rear-facing HDMI inputs (plus the convenience of an HDMI on the front), so kit builders should be satisfied. There's still only one HDMI output, though. The rear also houses component and composite inputs, stereo audio jacks, and single optical/coaxial digital inputs. Then there are stereo pre-outs for both a second zone and the main stereo pair. Back around the front, a USB port can be used to stream music files from a connected drive.

The receiver now supports 4K/60Hz HDMI 2.0 passthrough via those rear HDMI's, anticipating a time when you'll actually have a 2,160p source, and offers 4K upscaling (to 30Hz) should you not trust your screen to do the job for you. Providing the silicon muscle for this is the new ADV8005 NatureVue video signal processor from Analog Devices. This optimistically includes 4:4:4 colour space support. The receiver does not, however, have HDCP 2.2 copy protection.

Other connections include Ethernet and an M-Xport accessory dock with 6V power output. Speaker binding posts are chunky. System integrators can take advantage of the 12V trigger output.

Of course, the biggest difference from last season's model is the provision of integrated Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, which manifests itself in

the form of dual pop up aerials. In truth these erections rather compromise the traditional receiver aesthetic, and you may get away with keeping them recessed. That said, the NR1605's Wi-Fi doesn't see 5GHz networks, only 2.4GHz.

The user interface is slicker than an otter's pocket. From the outset, the NR1604 guides you through configuration, gently prompting speaker setup and sources, as well as Audyssey calibration, which comes MultEQ flavoured. This requires multiple position measurements to calibrate levels, distances and related settings. While a cardboard microphone stand contraption is flatpacked, you'll be better off using a camera tripod if you have one (the microphone has a standard tripod bush), as you can measure at exactly the right height for your seating.

Going on an Audyssey

I'm slowly warming to the versatility of MultEQ. Here, the main Reference setting does a solid job, although I found defeating it altogether can result in a rather fuller and occasionally more exciting sound. James McAvoy's opening monologue to *Filth* (Blu-ray) provides a useful comparator. With Audyssey MultEQ off, he appears to be standing closer to the mic, with MultEQ engaged he physically moves back, his diction seemingly becoming a little clearer.

When the pirate skips make their first approach on Captain Phillips (Blu-ray), Henry Jackman's score picks up tempo, pitter- ➤





'The biggest difference from last season's model is the provision of integrated Bluetooth and Wi-Fi'



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
7.2-channel
slim-line AVR

POSITIONING:
Marantz's sleek
flagship, below the
full-fat SR series

PEERS:
Pioneer VSX-S510;
Yamaha RX-S600;
Sony STR-DN1050



pattering across the front soundstage. With Audyssey MultEQ on Reference setting, the sea spray is wide, the voices of would-be assailants fighting to be heard in the mix. Turn MultEQ to Flat, where sound calibration is optimised for a slightly smaller listening room, and the mix is better behaved, almost clinically clear. Turn MultEQ off altogether and the action becomes a good deal heavier, and the seas suitably rougher. Switching to MultEQ Left/Right Bypass, the soundstage retains weight in the stereo pair, though central dialogue remains crisp. Some might consider this a good compromise.

While the NR1605 won't blow the bloody doors off, it does seem a tad more dynamic than its predecessor. The AVR's powerplant, still rated at 50W into eight ohms, is

'An entirely successful update, capable of an energetic multichannel performance – the best NR model yet'

deceptively agile. As Vin Diesel races through the gears at the start of *Fast & Furious 6* (Blu-ray), the NR1605 has no problem keeping pace and accelerating hard.

It goes without saying that the NR1605 will handle all current, popular surround formats, including DTS-HD Master Audio and the Dolby TrueHD family. While it's not Atmos capable, you can apply Dolby Pro-Logic IIz if you prefer front height speakers to rear backs.

As part of the 'simply does it' ethos, there are no swathes of DSP to contend with here. Audio presets are limited to Movie, Music and Games, with all-channel stereo, Dolby Pro-Logic, DTS Neo 6: Music and Virtual options; all have various traits. If nothing appeals there's always Direct.

Network functionality ticks the right boxes. The model is AirPlay compliant, supports Spotify Connect, and has internet radio services registered. The latter are divided into

With its antennas down, the NR1605 measures just 106mm high, so should fit easily into most AV cabinets

genres and location, as is the norm. I can't help feeling a filter for bitrates would be nice. The receiver happily streamed AIFF, MP3, FLAC (24-bit/192kHz), AAC, ALAC and WMA from my NAS.

The Marantz proved to be enjoyable with music. Lenny Kravitz's *Are You Gonna Go My Way* (Pure Audio Blu-ray), in 24-bit/192kHz, was delivered with acidic licks that'll test the mettle of any speakers. It also coped surprisingly well with a complex classical DSD (2.8MHz) download from 2L, playing with extreme clarity from a connected USB drive. Double DSD files weren't recognised, however.

A spin of *Ministry of Sound Anthems 90s* (CD), delivered via a Musical Fidelity V90 DAC, also reveals this AVR to be a plate-eyed party animal. The deep, recursive beat and centre-locked dialogue of *Pump Up The Jam* (Technotronic featuring Fell) is infectious. Processed via the Multichannel Stereo mode, your joint will soon be jumping. The AVR's Virtual surround mode is similarly fun, although both Pro-Logic and DTS music processing seemingly have no sense of rhythm.

Importantly, this Marantz offers good usability. That HDMI passthrough feature means you'll not need to induct reluctant family members into the home cinema guru gang just so they can operate their set-top box of choice. Passthrough can be set to the last input chosen or a specific default. Menus are responsive, the user interface intuitive, and there's a handy auto standby mode which turns the AVR off when it's not being used.

Real-world star

This update to Marantz's NR line is entirely successful. There's seemingly no overt sonic penalty incurred by building in the Wi-Fi receiver, and the improved feature set and connectivity make it easy to live with. Capable of an energetic multichannel performance, dynamic stereo and decent streaming functionality, the NR1605 is a real-world star. Marantz's best slim model yet ■

ON THE MENU



→ Marantz's user interface, which can be overlaid (over HDMI) on whatever you're watching, uses a simple menu structure jazzed up by a few visual tricks. Initial setup is guided to help fledgling AV addicts

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes. Plus Dolby Digital EX, Pro-Logic IIx, Pro-Logic IIz

DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes. Plus DTS-ES, DTS 96/24

THX: No

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: No

MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED): No

7 x 50W (eight ohms, two channel, 0.08% THD)

MULTIROOM: Yes. Second audio zone

AV INPUTS: 3 x composite inputs; 2 x digital audio (1 x optical, 1 x coaxial)

HDMI: 8 x inputs, 1 x output, v2.0/v1.4

VIDEO UPSCALING: To 4K

COMPONENT VIDEO: 2 x inputs, 1 x output

DIMENSIONS: 440(w) x 106(h) x 376(d)mm

WEIGHT: 8.6kg

ALSO FEATURING: Audyssey MultEQ with Dynamic Volume/DynamicEQ; built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth; Ethernet; Spotify Connect; internet radio; AirPlay; FM tuner, DLNA and USB file playback (includes hi-res DSD, AIFF, FLAC, WAV and ALAC); gapless playback; Android/iOS remote app; Pure Direct mode; compressed audio enhancer; HDMI passthrough; GUI overlay on HDMI

HCC VERDICT



Marantz NR1605

→ £600 Approx → www.marantz.co.uk

→ Tel: 0289 027 9830

HIGHS: Entertaining, lively multichannel performance; 4K/60Hz HDMI passthrough; Wi-Fi convenience; capable audio streamer; responsive user interface

LOWS: No 5GHz wireless support; no HDCP 2.2 copy protection; no Double DSD support

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

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Sony finally puts the wheels back on its Blu-ray bandwagon with this surprising new disc spinner, says [Steve May](#)

Blu-ray for the 4K generation



Sony's new range-topper adopts an uncluttered, straight-edged design

SONY HAS A chequered history when it comes to Blu-ray players. Its last high-end offering was back in 2009, and came in the shape of the admirably over-engineered BDP-S5000ES. Yet back then BD decks were simpler affairs, dedicated to the task of extracting the maximum number of bits from discs.

Things have moved on considerably since. Playing platters is now just one part of a suite of functionality, which also covers network file playback and subscription VOD. And in the intervening years Sony's player fleet has been dramatically commoditised, compromising creditable electronics with third-division cabinetry.

The BDP-S7200 represents a slight reversal of that direction. While not a premium player (this is still a 2.3kg cheapie), it seems a much more considered offering.

Certainly cosmetically, the BDP-S7200 is less fussy than recent BD players from the brand. We've lost the barmy stealth angles of the BDP-S4200 and BDP-S5200, which were

more Wayne Industries Tumbler than home entertainment, in favour of a fascia that's clean and minimalist; a glossy slab that will more easily stack with other AV gear.

The deck's user interface is unchanged. Embracing the standard Sony XMB (XrossMediaBar) layout, it's perfectly functional and nippy to navigate, thanks no doubt to the dual-core processor.

Exploring the menus reveals interesting functionality. Setup options include the usual variety of adjustable display parameters, including 4K upscaling frippery. There are two modes for this: Auto 1 and Auto 2. The former output maintains 1080p Full HD for video material but plays out JPEGs at 3,840 x 2,160. Auto 2 also upscales video material to 2,160p. >



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K upscaling Blu-ray player

POSITIONING:
Currently the highest specified BD deck from Sony

PEERS:
Pioneer BDP-170;
Samsung BD-F7500





There's a hidden front-panel USB port for quick file playback

mixes. Hi-res audio sounds absolutely spectacular, not least because the player doesn't have to move any parts to make a noise. In truth, while the disc loader makes the occasional mechanical grumble, this is a generally a well-behaved deck.

Getting dirty with ol' Spidey

With a Blu-ray, images have outstanding definition, subtle gradations and a vibrant colour palette. We're all so inured with

There's a variety of canny picture processing refinements, including IP Content NR Pro, which applies noise reduction to improve low-bitrate 'net-delivered content, and Sony's long-standing Super Bit Mapping which improves and smoothes gradations. You can even adjust the colour space of the player, using the YCbCr/RGB switch. There's a choice of either 4:2:2 or 4:4:4 chroma sampling.

Sony hasn't forgotten about sonic niceties either. DSEE does a decent job of interpolating back lost audio data from compressed music files, and there's compatibility with Super Audio CDs, with provision for DSD over HDMI if your AVR supports this.

The BDP-S7200 also boasts Super Wi-Fi, which appears to mean 'better than bad' wireless reception, courtesy of a high-sensitivity antenna. Wi-Fi support remains limited to 2.4GHz though; there's no dual-band support, something the growing number of enthusiasts adopting dual-band routers would readily approve of. By shunting video and music media onto a 5GHz network you'll be avoiding congestion on the more popular 2.4GHz band; stability is almost always better. As it happens, I experienced no problems streaming, but would usually stick with a wired hookup.

Usability is generally great, with disc loading speeds refreshingly fast. The Java-heavy release of Bond classic *Goldfinger* goes from tray to menu in just 40 seconds; others come in at less than 30.

Audio and video file support is wide-ranging. I successfully unwrapped MKV, MPEG-TS, MOV, MP4, AVI and WMV files both from a DLNA server and local USB drive, and had similar success with AAC, WAV, FLAC, MP3, WMA and AIFF audio tracks. The player also supports DSD64 and DSD64 5.1 multichannel



The BDP-S7200 comes with an idiot-proof stubby zapper

broadcast HD it's easy to forget just how magnificent BD can look in comparison. *The Amazing Spider-Man*, one of Sony's first Mastered in 4K releases, offers up an intricate web of detail, from the subtle textures on Spidey's suit, which gets dirtier throughout the movie as his battles intensify, to the snarling CGI minutia on the Lizard's face.

Performance can be further enhanced for UHD screen owners, thanks to the 4K scaler. It should be noted that this only works on 1080/24p material. In many ways this feature is one of the player's bigger surprises, bringing fresh nuance to Full HD material.

I partnered the BDP-S7200 with Sony's KD-65X9005A, itself no slouch when it comes to upscaling 1080p. That flatscreen, left to do all the work with the BDP-S7200, looks fine enough, but the player's UHD processing offers something new and a little different. When Emma Stone's Gwen Stacy turns up at the Parker house after the funeral of (*spoiler redaction – Ed*), her tear-stained visage has considerably more texture via the player's 4K output than when upscaled by the TV. And while the UHD TV set is great at resolving the wicker chairs on the porch behind Stone, it struggles with her skin tones. The BDP-S7200 is far more comfortable here; Stone's freckles clearly belong on her face, and no longer appear to float just above her skin. The deck also does an extraordinary job rendering her woollen hat and coat. The chipper inside the BDP-S7200 seems more creative when it comes to interpreting complex detail and noise. That said, the TV still has the edge when it comes to delineating fine vertical and horizontal lines. Which was better? That's ultimately a matter of personal judgment, but what's clear is that this Blu-ray player is doing something admirable and different from what we've seen before. And the fact that it's doing all this for just over £200 is remarkable.

The BDP-S7200 is therefore something of a return to form for Sony when it comes to BD. While I still hanker for the physical prowess of a flagship player, this model at least offers a classical aesthetic, married to lightning-fast load times, broad file support, and an excellent 4K scaler. An easily justified Blu-ray upgrade ■

ON THE MENU



→ The XMB user interface may lack a bit of design style, but it provides straightforward access to the Sony's fairly in-depth picture and sound tweaks, including control over 4K output and colour space

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 3,840 x 2,160
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 1 x output (v1.4)
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: No
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. 1 x coaxial digital audio
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: Yes
SACD/DVD-A: Yes/No
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 430(w) x 49(h) x 210(d)mm
WEIGHT: 2.3kg
FEATURES: 2 x USB inputs; iOS/Android app control; 4K video upscaler; 4K photo support; access to Sony Entertainment Network content portal; DLNA media playback of MPEG, AVI, MKV, WMV, MOV, MP3, AAC, WMA, FLAC, DSD, AIFF, ALAC, JPEG, PNG, GIF, MPO; Super Wi-Fi; 2D-3D conversion; Gracenote; Digital Sound Enhancement Engine (DSEE); Quick Start feature; Miracast screen mirroring

HCC VERDICT



Sony BDP-S7200

→ £220 Approx → www.sony.co.uk
 → Tel: 0845 6000 124

HIGHS: Cracking BD image quality; super-fast disc loader; hi-res audio file support; internal 4K upscaling worth investigating
LOWS: No dual-band Wi-Fi support; lightweight build quality; not best for catch-up; some may be sick of the XMB interface

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



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AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Premium 55in 4K
TV with extensive
customisation

POSITION:
B&O's only 4K TV.
Larger HD models
exist elsewhere in
the brand's range

PEERS:
Sony
KD-65X9005B;
Samsung
UE65HU8500

Bang & Olufsen's Avant successfully blends a premium design and extensive audio flexibility with solid picture quality, says **John Archer**. But it's not perfect

WHILE DANISH AV brand Bang & Olufsen has always had the luxury style thing down, it's sometimes struggled, at least where TVs are concerned, to keep up with the relentless speed of AV change. This is why the brand's new Avant comes as a (mostly) brilliant surprise. Its sensational design makes it one of the most 'B&O' TVs B&O has made, yet it sports a 4K screen, despite the format still being very much in its infancy.

Not that its 4K pixel count is the first thing you notice about the Avant. That honour

belongs to its sleek 'one-level screen', clever 'sandwich' design (which joins with a multi-layered rear to fool your eye into thinking the rear is much trimmer than it really is) and the gleaming, ultra-robust aluminium pole-and-circle floorstand our test screen arrived on (motorised wall and table-top mounting options are also available).

The new Avant's already strong aesthetic appeal flies off the scale, though, when you turn it on. For at this point everything starts to move...

First, the circular base glides around, moving the pole (which is offset from the stand's centre) with it. And the pole turns independently of the stand, rotating the angle of the TV on top. Then, a set of previously invisible speakers slide gracefully from the TV's bottom edge, before telescoping out to the left and right. And to round off the show, the picture opens out from the centre in tandem with the speaker extension. Every bit of this motion takes place without a creak.

The Avant is also unique in the feature department. Heading up the clever stuff is an auto-calibration system, which uses a 360-degree sensor protruding from the TV's top corner to measure ambient colour tones, as well as light levels, and adjusts the picture settings accordingly (within the parameters of established picture standards).

Where the Avant really gets space-age, though, is with its ability to be jacked into a whole-home AV and automation system, and its ability to drive 21 audio channels – including eight (enough for a 7.1 system) wirelessly. You can even establish different speaker partnerships for different content and/or zones around your home.

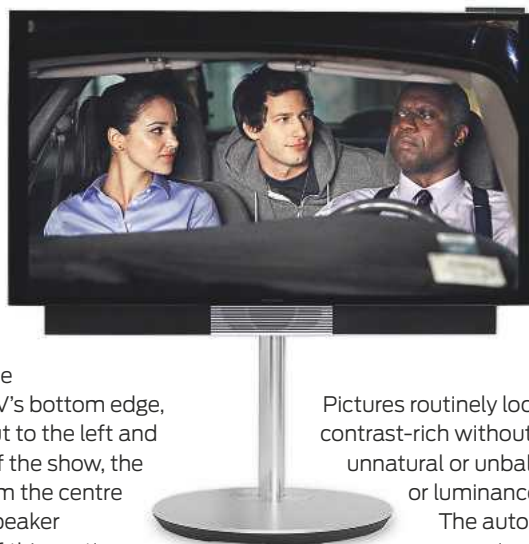
Its built-in speakers come in a 3.1 configuration, with a genuine centre speaker behind the aluminium 'drop down' panel at the centre and a 6.5in woofer around the back.

I received a pair of B&O's wireless £7,500 BeoLab 20 speakers with the TV, and these floorstanding beasts melded beautifully with the TV's built-in speakers, regardless of whether they were working on the gorgeous cityscape subtleties of David Fincher's *Seven* or the spectacular dynamics of the first alien city attack in silly blockbuster *Independence Day*. This effort by the integrated speakers, together with its unprecedented audio flexibility, makes the Avant the finest-sounding TV I've ever heard.

Soft landing

Yet the Avant isn't quite as class-leading with its pictures. With native 4K feeds there isn't as much sharpness as witnessed on some rivals, and while upscaling of HD Blu-rays is good, that slight softness remains. That said, pictures still look indefatigably 4K, with added depth and colour blend accuracy joining the (pleasingly noiseless) UHD detailing.

The star of the Avant's picture show, though, is its auto-optimisation system. The top-edge sensor works in conjunction with the



The Avant can be positioned on its motorised pole stand

TV's internal image processing systems to deliver pictures that continually adapt to both changing image content and ambient conditions superbly well.

Pictures routinely look bold, punchy, and contrast-rich without, crucially, exhibiting unnatural or unbalanced colours, or luminance jumps.

The automated optimisation even survives the monstrously difficult challenges posed by Voldemort's night attack on Hogwarts, delivering every shot with a lovely, involving combination of colour accuracy, black level depth and stability.

B&O is so confident in its picture engine that it deliberately hasn't provided a full range of colour, white balance and gamma management options. This may annoy some enthusiastic picture tweekers, but I can understand B&O's thinking.

The Avant is a fairly impressive (but not flawless) proponent of the third dimension. The optional active shutter 3D glasses take little brightness or colour fidelity out of images, which also look clean, reasonably sharp and full of space and depth. Some crosstalk ghosting and motion blur are apparent, though. The latter is less of a concern in 2D, however, ensuring most of that 4K detail remains during movement.

Flies in the 4K ointment

While the Avant is mostly a hugely-talented 4K TV it does suffer from some practical issues associated with the juvenile tech. One problem is that it doesn't support the HEVC decoder necessary to play, for instance, Netflix's 4K streams. Secondly, its HDMI's aren't built to the HDMI 2.0 spec, meaning they can't currently play 4K sources at higher rates than 30fps (although this latter issue is being addressed by an imminent firmware update, I'm told).

Throwing these shortcomings into sharper relief is the presence of a number of quality 4K TVs this year with integrated HEVC 4K support, HDMI 2.0 terminals and extensive Smart features – another area where the Avant falls woefully short. But these rivals certainly don't have the design or audio chops of B&O's first-gen 4K effort – and it's impossible not to have a soft spot for something as gloriously original, luxurious, high-performance and actually, considering what's on offer, affordable as B&O's new star ■

ON THE MENU



→ Bang & Olufsen's Smart portal feels rather dated. Highlights are BBC iPlayer, YouTube, a web browser and Spotify, but there's nothing here – including the rather staid presentation – that shouts 'luxury TV'...

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active shutter (glasses optional)

4K: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160

TUNER: Freeview HD

CONNECTIONS: 6 x HDMI; component video; USB; integrated Wi-Fi; Ethernet; PC port; system link options

SOUND: 240W

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A

CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): N/A

DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,283(w) x 706(h) x 96(d)mm

WEIGHT (OFF STAND): N/A

FEATURES: Built-in colour and light sensor; automatic picture calibration; driving for up to 21 speakers (including eight wirelessly) with different zonal configurations; TV angle presets plus manual motorised TV angle adjustments; motorised speakers; integrated 3.1 audio; DLNA streaming; USB multimedia support; internet radio support; limited Smart features

HCC VERDICT



Bang & Olufsen Avant

→ From £6,000 approx → www.bang-olufsen.com

HIGHS: Potent, flexible sound; engaging 4K pictures; gorgeous, motion-packed design; not a bad price for B&O, actually...

LOWS: 4K pictures a touch softer than some; minor 3D crosstalk; no HDMI 2.0 inputs; no HEVC 4K decoding

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Going mains-stream

Martin Pipe tries Devolo's latest powerline-networking package

POWERLINE NETWORKING – using your mains wiring to transmit more than just power – is a practical way of getting high-speed data, including HD video, around the home without relying on Ethernet tangles or crowded Wi-Fi bands. The £120 dLAN 650 Triple+ twin-pack from Devolo harnesses a patented 3-wire 'coupling' technology known as Range+ to achieve transfer rates of up to 600Mbps. Range+, I was told, will remain exclusive to Devolo gear (the latest HomePlug AV2 standards explore alternative tech avenues to improve coverage and speed).

One of the large but fairly cool-running dLAN 650 devices plugs into a wall socket near your router, connecting via Ethernet. The other device is located where network connectivity is needed, with a three-port Ethernet hub enabling multiple gear to be plumbed in. Both units sport status LEDs and mains sockets to replace those 'lost'. The devices are easy to install, and, although not

essential, the Cockpit Windows/Mac config software is welcome. They also worked well, providing glitch-free streaming of SD, HD and even 4K material from a NAS to a Samsung



TV. Even across the somewhat elderly wiring of my house, data transfer rates of over 300Mbps were measured.

I tried older HomePlug powerline adaptors (Devolo dLAN 200AVMini, Solwise PL1000) for compatibility, and both successfully integrated into my mains data network. Speeds were significantly lower (100Mbps) but useful nevertheless. In any case, it's good to know your older kit can still be used. The use of mains distribution boards and different mains 'rings' (i.e. upstairs and downstairs) slowed down things slightly, but data transfer rates were still serviceable ■

HCC VERDICT

Devolo dLAN 650 Triple+ → £120

Overall ★★★★★

LINDY CROMO NCX-100 → Approx £100

Cutting through the noise

Ed Selley ignores the outside world with some affordable noise-cancelling cans

BETTER KNOWN AS a manufacturer of cable and connection accessories, Lindy has recently been extending its range of electronics and now has a full suite of headphones and earphones. Of these, the Cromo NCX-100 is by far the most interesting. An active noise-cancelling design with carry case for £100 – what's the catch?

Nothing in terms of build or appearance suggests that the NCX-100 is built down to a price. While the styling suffers from influences of 'Dre-ism', the build is sturdy and the headphones themselves are very comfortable to wear, and supplied with useful

accessories including a mic for portable devices. They can be used as a normal passive design, but insert two AAA batteries into a housing on the side and you get a claimed 95dB noise reduction, selected by a control switch with an additional enhanced bass mode.

The positive mood continues when you listen to them. In passive mode, the NCX-100 is a little shut-in compared to open-back designs, but detail and tonality are good and the natural noise isolation of the design is effective too – you don't leak

much audio back into the outside world. With the noise-cancelling in play, the system is effective but refined in how it works, so there is none of the slightly dead feeling you can get with rival models. The processing works better on low-frequency noise rather than high, but I would argue it's more than effective for planes and trains. The bass enhance mode is about the only thing that is best ignored, as it sounds far too lumpy and unrefined. It can, of course, be switched off. The 1.4m cable could do with being longer, but overall these are a cost-effective domestic option and great for travel ■



HCC VERDICT

Lindy Cromo NCX-100 → £100

Overall ★★★★★

Plop two AAA batteries in the Lindy cans to enjoy noise cancelling

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Bright pupil

John Archer enjoys some of the imaging skills – and price tag – of Toshiba's top-flight Full HD TV, but discovers it suffers from familiar LCD/LED traits



THE 47L7453 IS an example of an increasingly endangered species: the premium HD TV. As UHD/4K TV prices plummet, the space where feature-rich HD TVs can operate is shrinking fast. That said, Toshiba's new effort seems on paper to strike a worthwhile balance between performance and price; £750 isn't mega-bucks for a 47in HD set equipped with some high-level Smart, picture and sound features. It even looks reasonably classy – if not very original – with its glossy black surround and skinny stand.

Its star Smart attraction is MediaGuide Replay. This integrates TiVo-like functionality, whereby the TV can automatically record (rather than just recommend) shows it thinks you'll like based on your viewing habits. The catch is that the 47L7453 doesn't carry any

built-in memory. You have to add your own external USB hard drive. Unfortunately, as I suspect few people will bother taking this step.

Picture spec highlights include direct LED lighting driven by a contrast-boosting local dimming system.

Toshiba is also using a new panel that apparently reduces the gaps between pixels to improve light output by up to 75 per cent and delivers a 14 per cent wider colour gamut, controlled by Toshiba's CEVO Engine processing.

These image tricks do show up in the TV's pictures. For instance, I was struck by the purity and brightness of white tones during *The Truman Show*'s 'edge of the world' sequence, while colours generally propelled off the screen with impressive intensity. The extra colour prowess certainly comes to the fore whenever a picture contains blue, red or green primaries (like most of *Rio 2*, actually). But the 47L7453 can do subtle as well, its CEVO processing engine delivering good finesse with subtler, trickier fare like the naturalistic photography in *Captain Phillips*.

There are a couple of areas where Toshiba's mid-sized flagship struggles. First, its motion processing can be glitchy, meaning you may prefer to leave it deactivated, even though this results in some resolution loss over moving objects. Second, and worse for those after a truly cinematic performance, the 47L7453 is a bit iffy when faced with low-light sequences. As is sometimes the case with LED screens, blacks appear more like greys, and experimenting with the Toshiba's backlight output or adaptive contrast feature can't compensate. Oddly the local dimming system seems to have no significant impact.

3D BDs look reasonable. There's more crosstalk than I'd usually expect with a passive system, pictures look slightly soft and motion is handled clumsily, but colour saturations and brightness levels are both strong, and the sense of space is well rendered.

Tempting, but...

On balance the 47L7453 has quite a lot to offer for its money, especially if you're looking for a TV for a bright room. But black level and Smart TV shortcomings (there's not much VOD here) stop it being irresistible ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Passive (four pairs of glasses supplied)
4K/ULTRA HD: No, 1,920 x 1,080
TUNER: Freeview HD
CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; component video; composite video; RGB Scart; optical audio output; headphone output; Ethernet; integrated Wi-Fi
SOUND: 30W
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 700cd/m2
CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): 7,000,000:1
DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,071(w) x 453(h) x 25.3(d)mm
WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 12.3kg
FEATURES: CEVO Engine processing; 'high brightness' and expanded colour gamut panel; local LED dimming; MediaGuide Replay auto record feature; USB PVR; Cloud TV Smart system; CEVO Audio with DTS Premium Sound; AMR+ 1500 motion processing; 2D-3D conversion; AutoView, Dynamic, Game, Movie (Hollywood Day/Hollywood Night/Hollywood Pro), PC, Standard and User picture modes; integrated test pattern; DLNA and USB media playback

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
47in Full HD TV

POSITIONING:
The L745 series is Toshiba's flagship HD range

PEERS:
Sony KDL-50W829;
Samsung UE48H6400

HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 47L7453

→ £750 Approx → www.toshiba.co.uk

→ Tel: 020 3051 9738

HIGHS: Very bright, colourful pictures; MediaGuide Replay is a great feature; nice price tag and design

LOWS: Average contrast; some motion issues; not many Smart TV apps

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

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Flatscreen fancy

Martin Pipe discovers that Samsung's 55HU7500 provides a sublime mix of cutting-edge features and high-performance image quality – and doesn't care that it's not curved

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
55in 4K Smart TV

POSITION:
Second-smallest member of the 'flat' HU7500 series

PEERS:
Philips 55PUS7809;
Sony KD-55X8505

WHEN I STARTED reviewing TVs, I would never have predicted one of the HU7500's sophistication – or the inexorable rise of Samsung from a low-profile budget brand to a TV behemoth. This second-level 4K 2014 screen oozes Smart capabilities and streaming video panache, and packs multiple digital tuners, USB PVR recording, four HDMI ports, voice control, 3D support (two pairs of RF active shutter glasses are thrown in), wireless/Ethernet home network integration, multimedia playback, a 'football' mode and social networking into its specifications count. Twenty years ago it would have looked like an alien artefact. And that's before considering its 4K/UHD resolution.

Back in 1994, it was held that the flatter the screen, the better. Since then, curved screens

have become all the rage. If such design appeals, you'll need to splash out more money on one of Samsung's HU8500 models – with that top-of-the-range set, you'll also get the brand's Quad Core Plus processing engine, as opposed to the Quad Core variant here, and the external connections box. Note, though, that the 55HU7500 offers a port for hookup to future One Connect boxes, should they be released.

This 55in TV is joined in the HU7500 range by 48in, 65in and – for those who want a really immersive viewing experience – 75in models. All benefit from the same elegant understated finish uncluttered by visible sockets and buttons. Connections and a basic control joystick are rear-located. Of the two handsets supplied, one is a conventional design, the



The HU7500 is supplied with Samsung's familiar Smart remote

other is the egg-shaped Smart design with pointer-control for slick menu access and web browsing.

Plug in a USB camera (one isn't integrated) and you can control this TV with silly hand-gestures (not recommended) or get Skyping (much more useful).

Wireless screen-mirroring, Wi-Fi Direct and SmartView are all supported features. One of the HDMI ports is compatible with MHL, and 'Samsung Link' can be installed on Windows

'The 4K resolution and Samsung's processing grunt conjures up a great sense of detail with HD sources'

PCs or Android devices so that their stored video, music and photo files can be played out on this TV with minimal hassle.

The HU7500 is easy to install, an initial setup wizard taking you through processes such as searching for channels, network configuration and passwords (although a battery of menus covers audio/video adjustments and manual setup). It's also a pleasant set to drive, thanks to the carousel-driven everyday menu system, and content-heavy Smart Hub.

For broadcast TV the HU7500 is flexible. Thanks to its twin satellite tuners and two terrestrial tuners you can record – either manually, or via the EPG – one programme on a USB device while viewing another. HD and SD channels can be mixed, and I had no problems recording two channels simultaneously while watching a third (carried on the same multiplex as one of the others). The caveats are that USB recordings are encrypted to prevent PC-based piracy, and that 4K broadcasts (via satellite) are unrecordable.

In addition, you have to switch between satellite and terrestrial; channels can't be mixed on one of the five possible favourites lists. The latter are essential for satellite, as the channel list lacks a 'find' facility. The HU7500 is geared not only to Freesat-type UK offerings, but alternative satellites like Astra 1 and Hotbird. It will even drive a motorised dish, and has a conditional-access port for foreign pay-TV. We used these abilities to receive European 4K test channels (see page 24).

Performance pros

Even out of the box the HU7500 delivers the goods visually – especially in 'movie' mode – and over a fairly wide viewing angle. With Blu-rays and studio-based HD broadcasts, I was treated to one of

the best black levels I've ever seen, aided by stable backlight illumination, although colour saturation was a tad high. Snap and vitality were in abundance, and surprisingly little work was required to achieve a basic calibration. AV geeks will appreciate the full range of techie adjustments, among them R/G/B-only display and 10-point white balance controls. Other presets yielded a rather weak contrast and lack of depth, thanks to the employment of an ambient-light sensor, power-conservation feature and other tricks (these can be turned off, thankfully).

With a BBC HD transport-stream of *Paycheck* streamed from a NAS to the TV's onboard DLNA player, it initially looked as if this Ben Affleck sci-fi had been shot on video rather than film, as actors and vehicles alike skated along with unrealistic fluidity. The reason is that Samsung switches on a motion compensation mode as default. Disabling 'Motion Plus' returns a sense of normality and without much drop in image clarity.

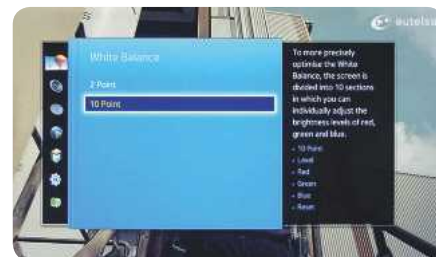
The 4K resolution and Samsung's processing grunt conjures up a great sense of detail with HD sources. Even SD channels and DVDs look good put through the 4K wringer, with no blockiness (but not searing sharpness either). Meanwhile, a spin of Disney Pixar's *Cars 2* on Blu-ray showed off the HU7500's active 3D potential; long-shots of the Allinol barrels ranged alongside the Tokyo pit-stops were mesmerising. And 30p and 50p 4K test material (via satellite) was breathtakingly-rendered, showcasing the leap in quality from upscaled to native 4K. UHD Netflix material, notably *House of Cards*, was outstanding too, with the sublimely-detailed time-lapse shots of Washington that open the show not challenging the HU7500 one iota.

I was hoping to accompany the Kevin Spacey drama with 5.1 surround, taking the set's optical output to my Onkyo AVR. Oddly, I got nothing but silence – even after switching to SD digital TV broadcasts – and had no luck experimenting with the handful of settings (switching to PCM audio, for example). So I had to stick with the TV's own speaker array. Thankfully, this trounces the second-rate sonics of some other flatscreens. The 60W concoction here may lack bass slam, but the soundstage is surprisingly well-balanced and clean.

Reap the rewards

In all, Samsung's HU7500 is an incredible TV. It lacks the look-at-me appeal of its curved sibling, but retains its picture quality prowess, conveying the sheer visual drama of 4K with aplomb and treating non-4K sources with respect. The £2,300 asking price may seem a little high compared to some other 55in 4K sets, but there's no doubting that those who invest will be rewarded ■

ON THE MENU



→ Calibration options on the Samsung set include 10-point white balance adjustment. The menu system is supremely swift to navigate, making setup and everyday use a joy

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active shutter 3D (two pairs of glasses supplied)
4K/ULTRA HD: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160
TUNER: Yes. 2 x Freeview HD; 2 x satellite
CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI (one with HDCP 2.2); Scart; component/composite video with analogue stereo audio; 3 x USB; Ethernet; optical digital audio output; CI slot; integrated Wi-Fi; One Connect port
SOUND: 60W
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A
CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): N/A
DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,228(w) x 706(h) x 35(d)mm
WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 17.8kg
FEATURES: LED backlighting; screen mirroring; eco-sensor; voice control (ready for gesture control/face recognition); Wi-Fi Direct; Smart Hub (including 'net radio, catch-up services, social networking, streaming services, games, web browser and apps); 2D-3D conversion; MHL; USB PVR with timeshift; ; DiSEqC multi-satellite (v1.2/1.3) support; DLNA media player; 1,000Hz Clear Motion Rate; film mode

HCC VERDICT



Samsung UE55HU7500

→ £2,300 Approx → www.samsung.co.uk

→ Tel: 0330 726 7864

HIGHS: Stunning pictures, especially from 4K sources; wide-ranging feature set; capable on-board audio system

LOWS: Can't record UHD broadcasts to USB; Satellite/terrestrial tuners not available simultaneously; some off-kilter presets

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

The cost of quality

Danny Phillips enjoys the potent aural performance from this high-end soundbar, but wonders if it should offer a little more for the money



At over a metre wide, this 'bar is ideal for large, 50in+ flatscreens

AT £1,300, PARADIGM'S Soundscape arrives with a promise of vastly superior sound quality to your average soundbar – just like B&W's Panorama 2 and the majestic Monitor Audio ASB-2.

As an audiophile 'bar it boasts top-quality components and sumptuous construction. It's reassuringly heavy, tipping the scales at 9.1kg, and its curvy gloss-black cabinet gleams like a car bonnet in a Michael Bay movie.

Minimalism is preserved by a black, cloth grille on the front. A bright (but dimmable) LED display shines through and a row of buttons is provided on top for close control. At 1,067mm wide, it's well-suited to TVs of 50in+.

So far so impressive, but the lack of HDMI inputs on the rear is disappointing for the money. It means you can't pass through video signals to your TV, and there's no ARC. It also rules out the possibility of Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio decoding; a shame given that a high-end system like this could really bring the best out of these formats.

Each of the Soundscape's seven drivers – four 4in mid/bass woofers and three dome tweeters – is powered by its own 50W amplifier. The left and right channels get a woofer and tweeter each, while the centre adds another woofer. Those woofers handle frequencies below 120Hz (down

to a claimed 40Hz) and Paradigm is confident they should provide all the bass you need, but if not a dedicated output lets you add an external sub. A supplied wireless receiver connects to any woofer, making it easier to place.

Fire up a film and you can hear every penny of the price tag oozing from the Soundscape's speakers. The scale of the soundstage is simply astonishing – in fact if you listened blind you could be forgiven for thinking it was coming from a set of large floorstanders.

I fed the Paradigm my *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* BD and marvelled at its mind-blowing bass output. As the Elemental stomps down a New York street, deep, punchy footsteps fill the room. The provision of a sub output may have been false modesty.

The sonic character is snappy and dynamic but wonderfully composed. A crisp leading edge brings the sound of smashed-up cars and buildings to life, blasts from Hellboy's 'Big Baby' shotgun are conveyed with speed and slam, and when the creature roars you feel physically threatened – but in a good way.

Meanwhile, silky, incisive highs ensure an open and detailed sound. Voices sound terrific, underpinned by bass and sprinkled with detail. If there's a flaw it's the poor Virtual Surround mode, but the volume and scale offered without this employed is enough to swallow you up.

The Paradigm's outstanding performance is enough to justify the hefty price tag on its own, but HDMI ports, HD audio support – and perhaps music streaming options beyond Bluetooth – should have been mandatory for the money ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 4 x 4in composite cone woofers; 3 x 1in aluminium dome tweeters
AMPLIFICATION: 7 x 50W
CONNECTIONS: 2 x optical digital inputs; coaxial digital input; subwoofer output; stereo analogue input
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No/No
SEPARATE SUB: No (wireless subwoofer receiver supplied)
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 1,067(w) x 140(h) x 127(d)mm
WEIGHT: 9.1kg
FEATURES: Bluetooth with apt-X; Dolby Digital and DTS decoding; Paradigm Virtual Surround; Music and Movie modes; on-wall and tabletop EQ settings; bass, treble, loudness settings

HCC VERDICT

Paradigm Soundscape

→£1,300 → www.paradigm.com

HIGHS: Outstanding sound quality; deep, commanding bass and eloquent detail; gorgeous design; luxury build quality
LOWS: No HDMI sockets or HD audio decoding; relatively expensive

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



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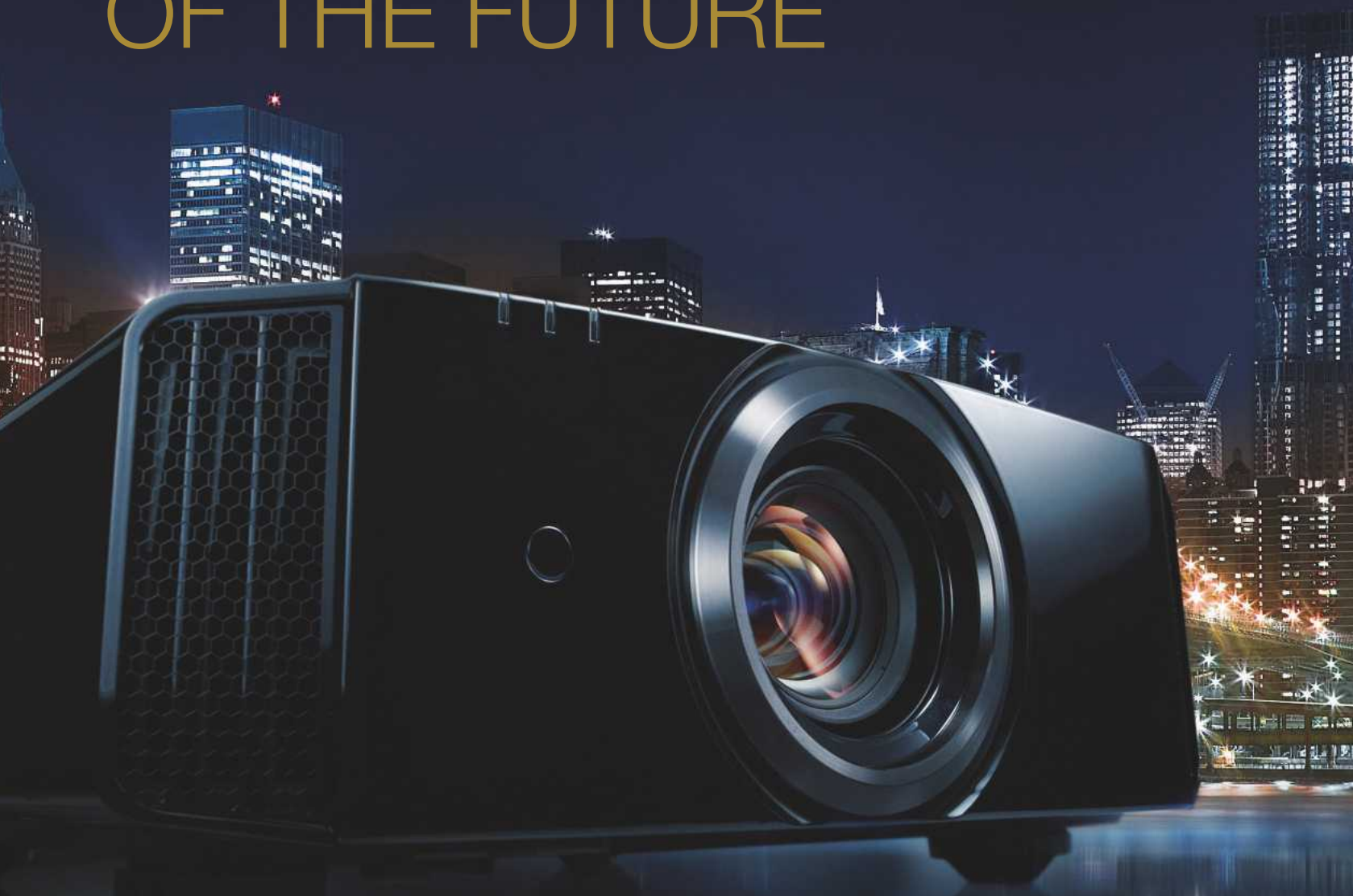
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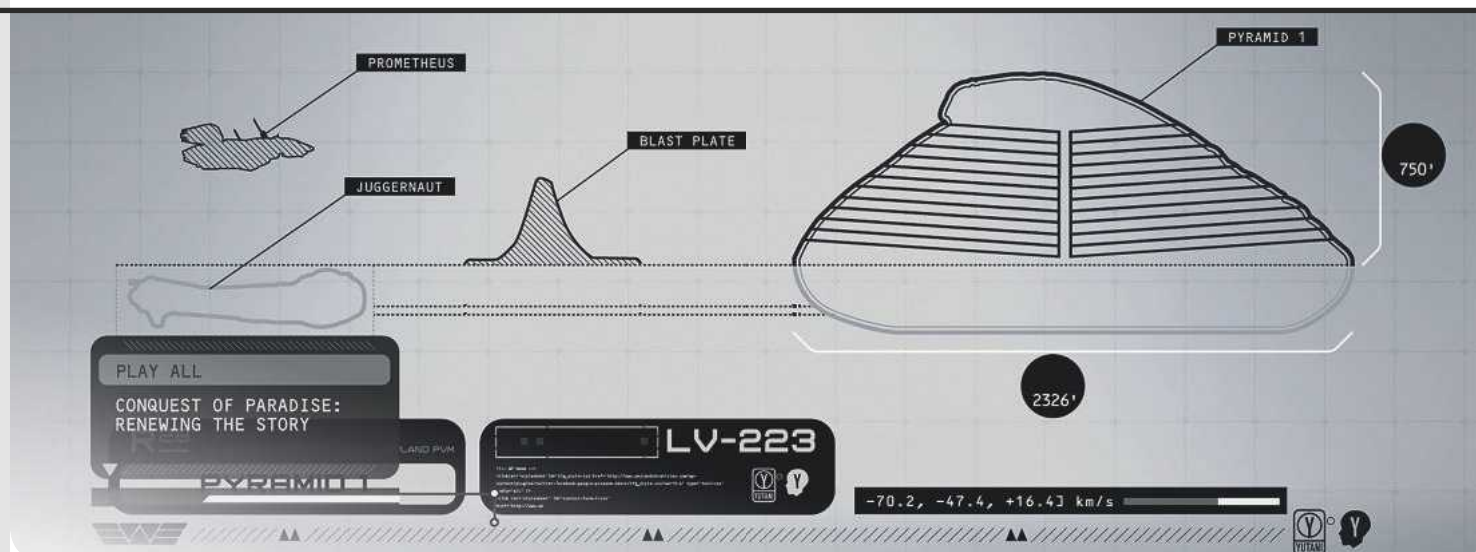
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* The 2014 range of JVC D-ILA Projectors consists of model numbers DLA-X900R, DLA-X700R, DLA-X500R. Visit www.jvc.co.uk for more details.

** Contrast ratio specifications are for the DLA-X900R.



DIGITAL COPY

The extra features on Blu-rays are something that **Mark Craven** realises he never wants to live without, and counts them as just another reason why physical discs are king

THE LIST OF movies that I'm still waiting for on Blu-ray is one shorter now, following Arrow Video's release of *The 'Burbs*. Joe Dante's black comedy has been a staple of my collection ever since I first recorded it off-air back in the early '90s (the PG-rated version, sniff), and to say I was excited about viewing it in hi-def would be an understatement.

The disc, thankfully, doesn't disappoint in terms of picture quality (see our review on p103), but where it really excels is with its extra features. Supplementary materials, extras, bonus bits, call 'em what you will – I love 'em, and Arrow's devotion to releasing *The 'Burbs* with additional content is great for fans like myself.

After the credits roll...

Here's how movie night breaks down in the Craven household. A full 30 minutes is spent choosing what film to watch, followed by another 20-minute interval while I nip out to the shop for some Revels. Then the disc is played, the end credits roll, Mrs Craven shrugs her shoulders at what we've just witnessed, and I then turn to the special features menu.

True, I am much more likely to do this if it's a movie I've really enjoyed, but I'll even investigate if the flick was an absolute stinker – on the off-chance that there's some candid interview with the producer explaining how such a cinematic turkey ever got made. **I'm a geek, you see: with a film fresh in the memory, I always get an appetite to learn more about it.** Deleted scenes, featurettes, documentaries and commentary tracks are manna from heaven. I've been known to watch the same film again straightaway with the chat track on.

And a good extra can be more enjoyable than the movie itself. The DVD release of Ridley Scott's *Matchstick Men* is a case in point. The film may be a bit lightweight, but the *Making of...* doc is superb viewing. Produced by regular Scott contributor Charles De Lauzirika, it explains exactly why the director, then fresh from *Gladiator*, is helming a knockabout con-man comedy in the first place, going into meticulous detail. Since then, I've always devoured the bonus bits on Scott's releases, including *Robin Hood*, *Blade Runner* and *Prometheus* (pictured), and never been disappointed.

And other extras you'd be daft to ignore? The fascinating *The Shark is Still Working* doc that accompanies *Jaws*, the brilliantly in-depth full-length *Inferno...* feature on *The Expendables* Blu-ray, the have-a-go-at-sound-design tool for *Fight Club*, and the sheer range of material that Peter Jackson serves up for his *Lord of the Rings* movies.

However, remove those goodies from the disc and my interest wanes. I want to gorge on them when I'm caught in the moment, not have to hunt them down on YouTube later. This is something that has been bugging me about Netflix. At the end of a streamed movie it's me that's shrugging my shoulders. Where's the split-screen green-screen analysis? Where's the 90-minute behind-the-scenes documentary?

In fact, come to think of it, where's the collector's booklet, or steelbook casing, or reversible cover art? All these little extra touches that make me feel warm and fuzzy inside just aren't an option when you're sucking on a digital pipe for your daily filmic fix. So, to all those content creators in the Blu-ray community: keep up the good work ■

Do you watch a movie's extra features? Or give them a miss? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Mark Craven admits that he hasn't yet trawled through all 12,000 images and 60 hours of bonus content on the *Alien Anthology* Blu-ray boxset





FILM FANATIC

Anton van Beek casts his gaze back over this Summer's blockbusters and wonders what he can learn from their box office performance

ANOTHER SUMMER HAS come to an end and with it the tidal wave of Hollywood blockbusters has been reduced to a dribble. Having devoted almost as much time over the past few months to keeping an eye on box office results, and critical reaction, as I did to watching the movies themselves, I'm wondering what 2014 can tell us about the current state of play in Tinseltown.

Going into this Summer, *Guardians of the Galaxy* was the rank outsider. Yes, it had the weight of Walt Disney and Marvel Studios behind it, but it was still an unknown property outside of comic book fandom (a sizeable contingent of which predicted it would be Marvel's first flop). And it was directed by someone who cut his teeth writing scripts for budget-movie-merchants Troma, before moving up to helm the cult horror-comedy *Slither*.

But, in the tradition of a good Hollywood underdog story, *GotG* emerged as the year's biggest hit, enjoying a larger opening day at the US box office than either *Thor: The Dark World* or *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* – both of which had better brand recognition than Marvel's fresh band of space-faring misfits. It also proved to be a success with reviewers, maintaining an 83 per cent positive rating among 'top critics' on the reviews aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes.

Furthermore, the galactic adventure threw off stereotypes by being popular with female cinemagoers, too. **Exit polls over its US opening weekend indicated that 44 per cent of the audience was female** – the largest share to date for any Marvel movie.

However, not all comic book adaptations fared as well, with the most obvious flop being Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller's *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*. The oh-so-stylish 2005 original had a strong

opening at the ticket window, pulling in around \$30million; its follow-up could manage only a miserable \$6million. Clearly, nine years is too long for some to wait for a sequel. And it's a mistake that Marvel won't be making with *Guardians of the Galaxy 2*.

The traditional split between critical reaction and audience figures when it comes to Hollywood's Summer fare was once again summed up by popcorn king Michael Bay and the two movies that boasted his involvement. Both *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (which he directed) and the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* reboot (which he produced) set tills ringing. The former especially – this fourth slice of battling 'bot action has netted more than \$1billion so far around the world, becoming the all-time highest-grossing film in China along the way. In fact, almost 80 per cent of its box office return came from outside the US, demonstrating why international territories are more important than ever to studios.

A smarter breed of blockbuster

Overall, I think film fans should be happy with the year's work as Autumn approaches. The likes of *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* have shown that there is an appetite for a smarter breed of blockbuster that doesn't solely rely on how much destruction they can cram into their two-hour running time.

But the biggest thing I'll take away from this Summer's movie slate is that if you really want to blag a box office hit, be sure to include at least one heavily-armed anthropomorphized animal (or plant) and you won't go far wrong ■

What were your favourites among this year's blockbusters? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Guardians of the Galaxy fan **Anton van Beek** has finally cracked and refuses to say anything more than 'I am Beek' in response to our questions



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THE INSIDER

Hollywood-based British thesp **Martin Dew** reveals that actually meeting – and working with – one of your cinematic idols is an unforgettable experience, even in the rain on Dartmoor

BOXING DAY, 1975: my father reluctantly drove me and my older brother to the ABC Cinema in Reading. At the risk of disruption of a peaceful Christmas break, and due to my relentless persistence, we were going to see a hitherto little-known motion picture about a serrated-toothed fish called *Jaws*. December 26th was Universal Pictures' UK-wide general release of the thriller. Indeed, the sequence of events of that evening is vivid in my memory. Not only was I going to see **a flick that would inspire a lifelong passion for film, drama, music and entertainment technology** (and more...) but after the wonder of the experience, I would confidently announce to my dad that I would be in a Steven Spielberg film one day. (In fact, I remember being rather miffed that Steven had not called to ask me to play the shark's hapless second victim, Alex Kintner, who did, after all, have red hair and was clearly around my age...)

Cut to: Los Angeles, August 2010. Long-time first assistant director to Steven Spielberg and executive producer at Dreamworks, Adam Somner, asked if I would be interested to come and work initially as a camera stand-in for various actors on *War Horse*, which was filming in Britain. Obviously, I said 'yes.'

Then it got even more exciting. After flying in from L.A., it transpired that I had been cast as David Thewlis' henchman, Lyons' Cronie. The production housed me, along with other members of the cast, in a hotel on the edge of Dartmoor.

After a dawn call-time one early September morning, I was waiting on the sidelines of our vast and idyllic outdoor set, when Adam's megaphone pierced the morning air with a crackle that sounded distinctly like my name. As I belted over, a canvas of ever-changing hues in an operatic sky over the

moors was noticeably gripping Academy Award-winning cinematographer Janusz Kaminski. Adam introduced me to Steven and we shook hands. Wait a minute... slow down. Had I just met the man who, among other just slightly spectacular things, had directed the one about the rather large shark mentioned earlier, plus the one about the adventurer in the fedora, and that deftly-crafted opus about the Holocaust? My favourite director, the one whose films I'd always wanted to be in?

And, action!

Anyway, back to work. Steven started directing me in a short vignette greeting David Thewlis' Lyons. After three or four takes, he called for a new angle. As the crew stirred, Steven approached, put his hand on my arm and said, 'Martin, I'm not going to use my stars in this shot.' Well, that just made me feel like a million dollars (or, rather, a million pounds). What resonated immediately about him was his unassuming, disarming character, his humility and generosity of spirit. His innate ability to make actors relax, while coaxing nuance from their performances, is surely one of the prodigious skills that carries his output. And since that first day, he's made a point of remembering my name and that same cheerful working relationship carried on over into *Lincoln*.

Jaws is still my favourite film to this day. It's perfection. I only hope that if the friendly team at Dreamworks asks me to appear in another of Spielberg's films, I will have a chance to show him my original 1975 *Jaws* memorabilia (of which I now have quite a lot), and bend his ear about home cinema, too... ■

What movie do you remember most from your childhood? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

UK-born **Martin Dew** trained as an actor but ended up working for Lucasfilm THX and then NEC in the US. Now, though, he's back in front of the camera



This cinema room in a converted double garage houses its front speakers in a dedicated screen wall

Aero dynamic audio...

This self-designed cinema room mixes affordable hardware with some neat aesthetic touches and doubles as a photo studio. Owner **Gary Thompson** gives us a tour



Introduce yourself...

I'm Gary Thompson, 46 years old from Glasgow, married with three daughters. I have a roofing business, Thompson Roofing, and a small photography business, which is why my cinema conversion had to merge a photography suite and home cinema into one space...

How long have you been into home cinema? What was the first AV setup you had?

My interest in home cinema probably first began many years ago when I purchased a Sony DVD player with surround sound speakers that stood in the four corners of my living room, like high-rise flats! From that point forward I soon realised that the aural experience was just as important as the visual one.

Whereabouts in your house is your movie den?

The home cinema/photo studio uses a double-garage conversion. It's accessed through a small family room which is used as an office.

And what hardware is in the setup?

I have a projector from BenQ – the DLP W1300 – and this works in conjunction with a 106in electric screen from Sapphire. My AV receiver is a Yamaha model, the RX-V775, and sources are a Pioneer BDP-450 Blu-ray player and a WD TV Live media streamer.

The Yamaha drives my speaker system – four Cambridge Audio Aero 6 floorstanders, one Cambridge Audio Aero 5 centre and one Cambridge Audio Aero 9 subwoofer. This speaker array is a 5.1 configuration.

The dynamics of this package are really strong with a great cohesion of sound, packed full of detail and bass.

Gary has added some glamour to the cinema room with iconic movie posters



What's your opinion of the system's performance? What do you really love about it, and what areas, if any, do you think could be improved?

The BenQ projector offers 1080p HD with incredible detail, and the depth of image is impressive. Before seeing a demo of this projector I would never have imagined a projector could deliver an image as sharp and full of detail like this.

As for the Cambridge Audio speakers, I have always been a fan of Cambridge Audio and also have a Cambridge Audio setup in my living room. The Aero range is equipped with Balanced Mode Radiator (BMR) drivers instead of tweeters, which helps disperse the sound wider than a regular tweeter. This delivers fantastic sound detail across the room.

The Aero 9 boasts 500W and incorporates both front and down-firing drivers [the latter is an Auxiliary Bass Radiator]. This is the one piece of kit that you can't live without! Worth



Cambridge Audio's Aero models utilise BMR drivers for widely dispersed sonics

every penny, but be warned if you have any loose fixtures or fittings this sub will find them. The vents on my windows had to be glued shut to stop them rattling!

The Pioneer BDP-450 is packed with extras and technology and delivers on all fronts, I just can't fault it.

What I like most about this home cinema, is it provides the time and space to forget about work and the stresses of the week. Just sit back with the family and enjoy.

The room itself looks very slick...

Yes, the design and layout of the room was very important. We basically started with a concrete floor and brick walls, so the first task was to build a room. Searching the internet and reading magazines for ideas and inspiration helped.

Once I had figured out the throw ratio of the BenQ projector and screen size we started to build from there. The finished result had to look like it was a professional installation, at times this was challenging and time consuming. But the outcome was worth the effort.

As it needs to double up as a photo studio, the front wall had to incorporate my rolls of photography backdrop papers. These are hidden out of sight behind the front pelmet. In total we used more than 30m of fabric to clad the front wall.

The frame itself was mostly built from CLS timber and MDF covered with acoustic fabric. The measurements had to be precise to fit each speaker perfectly. The electric projector screen is also hidden behind a small pelmet. >



The projector screen is a 106in electric model

Gary built the projector housing himself



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I had promised my wife that it wouldn't cost much and I wouldn't make much mess. I was wrong on both counts.

Did you build the front screen wall and projector housing yourself?

Yes, we built everything from scratch. The shape and design of the PJ housing was chosen to resemble images I found online when searching for 'Art Deco Cinema'. It sort of evolved from there. The front panel drops down on a piano hinge for access, this was cut from MDF and, again, clad with speaker fabric.

What advice do you have for readers planning their cinema room?

I think it's really important to do your homework and educate yourself on what type of system will suit your needs. This can even

'I promised my wife the install wouldn't cost much or make much mess. I was wrong on both counts'

involve watching YouTube videos showing installations and reviews of equipment.

Personally, when I had a good idea of what equipment I was after, I went to Richer Sounds in Glasgow where I have bought AV goods over the last 10 years. They have a demo room in store, complete with a sofa and coffee machine. Their sales assistant spent time setting up various systems available to demo, including the projector and screen.

This allows you to sit back and experience the different equipment and setups to suit your needs and budget. This sort of service is priceless, not to mention they have a great source of knowledge that comes in handy when you're armed with a list of questions.

What do friends and family think of the system?

I think when you tell anyone you have a home cinema they may be expecting something quite cheesy. Hopefully, I have managed to avoid that. Everyone that has seen it so far has been impressed and surprised.

What's your current favourite Blu-ray?

Favourite Blu-ray so far this year would have

BE IN HCC!

EMAIL US: If you want to share your home cinema setup – big or small – with other *HCC* readers, email a selection of hi-res pictures (including one of yourself if you want) to letters@homecinemachoice.com with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and we'll be in touch.



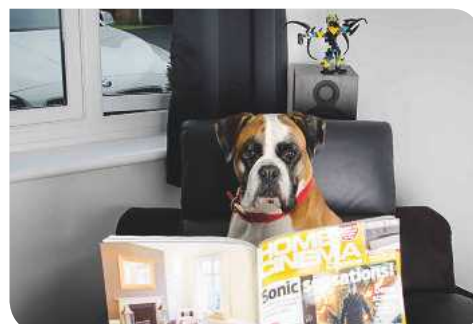
Above left: A Pioneer BDP-450 Blu-ray player delivers HD content, alongside a WD media player

Above: The cinema has a second life as Gary's photography studio

Left: Also lurking in the kit cupboard are the Yamaha AV receiver and Cambridge Audio subwoofer



Even Gary's dog likes to read *HCC* – when he's not pressing paws on the remote control...



to be the Mark Wahlberg actioner *Lone Survivor*. Not just a great movie but the quality of the soundmix really draws you into the action, particularly as the Aero 9 subwoofer vibrates across your chest!

What discs do you use to show off the system to visitors?

If I was using a disc to demo my system I would have said *The Dark Knight* (the very start of the movie), but I recently watched *Oblivion* with Tom Cruise... Probably not the best storyline, but the sound quality, detail and depth of image that this Blu-ray produces is fantastic.

And do you watch any movies/TV from download/streaming sites, such as Netflix or Amazon Instant Video?

If you're watching one or two good films a week you soon run out. We subscribe to Netflix as our back up. You can still find a half-decent film.

Most of the big titles on Netflix you have probably seen already.

What's your favourite bit of kit?

Favourite, without a doubt, would be the aforementioned Cambridge Audio Aero 9 woofer. As you can see I had to use acoustic foam tiles to stop vibration and throw the sound outwards. The door where the equipment and sub are housed had large holes cut out before being clad with fabric. All the remotes work through the fabric which keeps things hidden away.

Do you have your eye on any new equipment?

I think the next thing on my list would be a universal smart remote control before my pile of handsets gets any bigger.

Finally, are you excited by 4K/Ultra HD?

At the moment I am quite happy with the way things are. Of course, the Yamaha RX-V775 upscales to 4K, although the projector is only 1080p...

Actually, I think what Dolby Atmos may bring to future systems is something to really look forward to ■

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology?
Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **HCC** is here to help

Do I wait for Rec. 2020?

Are there any 4K TVs or projectors that support the Rec. 2020 colour space? I know none of the current Sony projectors have it, so JVC were right not to rush-release a native 4k model. After all, you won't be able to upgrade or update from Rec. 709 to Rec. 2020 (Sony Triluminos is not the same!). It means that current 4K displays are not futureproof as 4K Blu-rays most likely will cater for Rec. 2020. The whole point of 4K is not just resolution, but wider colour space.

Romualds Pizans, via email

John Archer replies: The first thing to say is that Rec. 2020 sounds awesome. We agree that the hugely expanded colour

gamut Rec. 2020 encompasses could be at least as important to picture quality as 4K's four-times HD resolution. It's true, too, that the 4K Blu-ray system may support it, and that HDMI 2.0 does support it – or, as we'll see, a limited form of it.

However, Rec. 2020 is such a huge leap from the current (and undoubtedly very outdated) Rec. 709 colour standard that we'd argue that it's not something that should impact any current buying decisions.

The main reason is that while many of today's TVs and projectors are capable of delivering colour well beyond Rec. 709, there are none that can currently reach the colour space of Rec. 2020. Quantum Dot

technology of the sort used on Sony's first-generation of Triluminos TVs is capable of getting quite close, but it doesn't go all the way. Sony has also suggested it will launch a 4K OLED TV for the professional market that should support Rec. 2020 – but this isn't coming until 2015, and will be well beyond the pocket of normal consumers. With LCD/LED technology, Rec. 2020 seems barely feasible. We're not saying it can't be done, but it's certainly going to be a stretch. Similarly, it's our understanding that Rec. 2020 is borderline impossible to achieve with the UHP lamps found in the vast majority of projectors.

Another issue is that the full potential of Rec. 2020

isn't supported by HDMI 2.0. Large data rates would be needed to deliver a full-quality Rec. 2020 feed, with no significant chroma subsampling compromises or frame-rate limitations – rates that would exceed HDMI 2.0's maximum of 18Gbps. Indeed, HDMI 2.0 cannot offer 10-bit colour with 4:4:4 subsampling at rates beyond 30fps, let alone anything more exotic. So we'll likely need a new connections system before true Rec. 2020 playback becomes a reality.

The ITU-R recommendation that we strive for Rec. 2020, and Rec. 2020's possible inclusion on a 4K Blu-ray format, is a sensible result of forward-thinking organizations trying to include

★ STAR LETTER...

Do I upgrade now, or should I wait for AV dust to settle?

I've just subscribed to *HCC* having bought the last two issues, as I'm finally looking at a major overhaul of my home cinema. Twelve years ago I used to work in the AV industry for a retail store and then a manufacturer. The choice was pretty simple. TV: Pioneer plasma. AV amp: Denon, Pioneer, or Yamaha. Speakers: well, for satellites, it was KEF eggs.

I left the industry with a Pioneer 436XDE, Denon AVR-3802, and the ubiquitous eggs. All was simple (apart from the cabling) and to be fair this kit has been used daily ever since and has been nothing but a worthy investment of what seemed (and was) a large amount of money at the time.

Roll on to present day and it's an absolute minefield of choice. LED, OLED, 4K, DTS-HD (Neo this and that), Dolby TrueHD. No more plasma! New AV manufacturers, new connections, new TV brands; at least the speaker guys are fairly settled.

Finally my head has started to be turned, and while I still think my plasma picture doesn't embarrass itself, I have to admit the

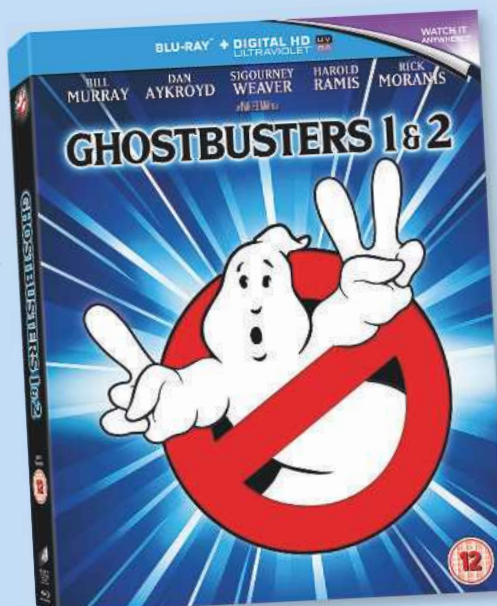
slim frames, curves, 3D and miniscule bezels are seeping into my consciousness. I'm also intrigued by the lossless sound formats, which I hope bring a much more immersive sound.

Just when I thought I'd settled on a setup to go and audition, I picked up a copy of your mag. My thinking was it would give a credence (or otherwise) to the choices I was making, and point me in the direction of anything I'd missed. I'd been heading towards

a Samsung 55HU8500, an Anthem MRX-510, and some on-wall speakers – perhaps Monitor Audio Shadows or one of the DALI options.

Delve into the magazine and I read two things to throw a spanner in the works – Dolby Atmos, and new specs for UHD TVs!

Still, it's made me think that actually maybe a 4K TV is overkill for the moment. I watch mostly from Sky, and occasionally Blu-ray from a PS3 and have a PS4 (with hardly any games yet). So perhaps a decent 55in HDTV would suffice until 4K becomes more established and the specs have settled down. But now I'm wondering if Atmos is going to be a



from the off a future spec for the industry to aim towards. Yes, it's possible, even probable, that the current generation of 4K TVs and projectors will not get as close to the possibilities of Rec. 2020 as next year's 4K TVs and projectors. But products inevitably get better every year anyway. So you could choose to wait for 2015's displays to arrive – if you want to hold on for a full Rec. 2020 implementation to appear – but you'll need a lot more patience than we have.

Should I zoom my PJ's image?

What are the pros and cons of an anamorphic lens versus zooming up and down if you have a 2.35:1 screen for your projector?

David Simpson, Lincoln

John Archer replies: There are indeed pros and cons to both the anamorphic lens and 'zooming' approaches to reproducing 2.35:1 movies on a 2.35:1 screen. Basically speaking, they stack up like this.

Adding an anamorphic lens attachment to your projector (if your projector even supports such an attachment) scores over the zooming approach by offering an increased vertical

resolution, and a brighter picture. However, good-quality anamorphic lenses can be very expensive, and a poor-quality one can soften the image. Also, the projector uses processing to upscale the image vertically to support anamorphic lens playback, so you don't get the pixel-for-pixel precision many

home cinema fans live for. And poor-quality scaling can certainly result in processing artifacts and signs of optical distortion.

Zooming and focusing your projector to essentially push the black bars above and below 2.35:1 transfers off the edges of your screen is the cheap option, as you don't need any external

lenses. This approach doesn't require any rescaling processing to be applied to the picture either, preserving its pixel-for-pixel purity.

However, zoomed images of this sort will suffer reduced vertical resolution, potentially revealing issues such as jagged edges and visible pixel structure >



Sony's Triluminos displays: a wide colour gamut, but not Rec. 2020

real leap forward rather than the more incremental changes of the last few years?

So, do you think it is worth investing in a 4K TV or going for a top-spec 1080p set? Would you be waiting for Dolby Atmos or going for something now? And any dates on when you might be reviewing an Atmos system?

Lastly, if you weren't to wait where would you put £5,000-ish tomorrow to buy a TV, AVR and speakers to get another 10 years-plus of sterling service?

Martin, via email

Mark Craven replies: It's great you've had so much enjoyment out of your current setup – and it stresses the point that while it can seem that AV tech moves at a rapid pace, hardware doesn't become 'obsolete' just because newer-fangled updates have arrived. But, we all get the upgrade bug...

As you point out, the AV landscape is changing, and this makes things a little complex. Firstly, it's probably worth investing in a 4K TV over a top-spec 1080p

set if you're convinced you no longer want your Pioneer plasma. You could buy a Full HD model – and it will save you money – but you'll probably find yourself wanting to upgrade again soon. Samsung's HU8500 (which also ticks your curved, slim and stylish boxes) is a cracking set, with good 4K upscaling, HEVC decoding for 4K content streams, and HDMI 2.0. Meanwhile, the external connections box makes it as futureproof as a modern screen can be, and the evolving 4K standards you mention refer more to the source side than the display.

As for Atmos, we will review as soon as software is available. In the meantime, grab a demo. AV retailers should roll out Atmos setups with clip discs for you to sample in the next few weeks. If you enjoy it, you'll need to at least add some speakers to your KEF setup. Otherwise, these would be the last thing I'd upgrade, mainly due to cost – those DALI Rubicon on-walls will eat up most of your £5K budget. Monitor Audio's

more-affordable Shadow speakers are currently being auditioned; our initial impressions are positive.

If you're not fussed by Atmos, then the Anthem you've shortlisted is a great choice, bringing with it a brilliant auto EQ system, plenty of power and a thrilling performance. It doesn't offer HDMI 2.0 for passthrough of high frame-rate 4K, nor HDCP 2.2. This could be a niggle with future 4K standards, but most likely one that could be overcome by split A/V feeds. Alternatively, there are plenty of Atmos-ready AVRs around that offer HDMI 2.0, and Onkyo's models add HDCP 2.2.

In short, the Samsung TV, MA speakers and Anthem amp would make a great (and eye-catching system), with lossless audio and 4K to boot. But you should consider Atmos, which the Anthem doesn't support.

Star letter-writer Martin wins a copy of the *Ghostbusters 1 & 2* Blu-ray double-pack, which is available to buy now courtesy of Sony Pictures Entertainment.

– especially if your screen is very large. Such zoomed images can also look less bright than those produced through an anamorphic lens; the 'dead' space between pixels is exaggerated by the zooming process, and you're not using the full imaging area of your PJ.

It used to also be a lot more hassle to zoom images up to remove their black bars, but this problem has been reduced in recent years by the introduction on some projectors of Lens Memory slots, where you can store the zoom and focus settings for multiple aspect ratios, available for accessing when needed.

What this all boils down to is perhaps a decision based on screen size. If you're using a really large screen, you may prefer the results you get from a good-quality anamorphic lens attachment. But for a 'regular' kind of projection screen, lens zooming could well be good enough.

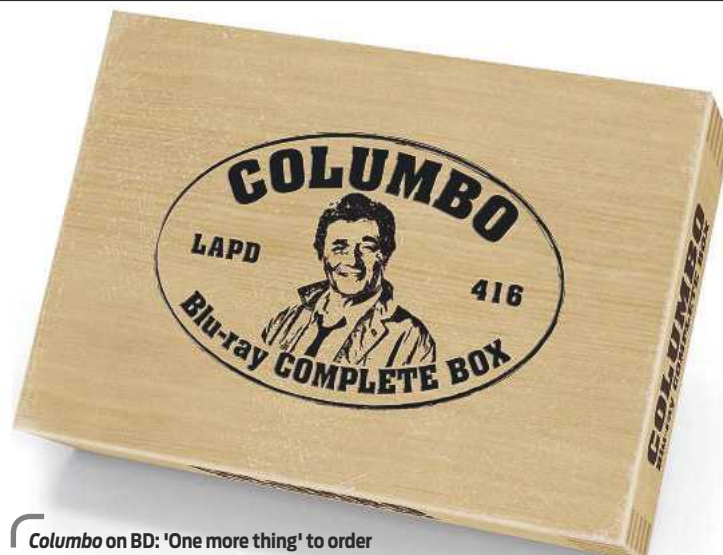
I'm a Blu-ray addict!

I read Martin Dew's article on the subject of region coding (HCC #238) with interest.

I'm afraid that some years ago I fell prey to the temptation to stock up on Blu-ray discs from around the world – the UK market just didn't have everything I needed to build the definitive collection! And with the web it's all too easy these days to come across the latest releases around the world, then hunt them down via those overseas websites who shall remain nameless, and make some great purchases.

It really helps that, thanks to your reviews/advice, 18 months ago I purchased an Oppo BDP-105 player which has proved to be absolutely superb at playing all the formats you can think of, plus it's equipped to play region-locked Blu-ray discs from the USA/Canada and elsewhere.

Having the right hardware has helped me expand my collection – way too far as my wife continually tells me ('when on



Columbo on BD: 'One more thing' to order

Earth are we going to find the time to watch all these movies?').

So what have I bought? Well, recent examples that spring to mind are the complete *Columbo* TV series contained in an attractive cigar box, courtesy of Amazon Japan. Then there are countless region-locked Criterion movies with their copious and consistently excellent extras (the superb *Zatoichi: The Blind Swordsman* box set,

a John Cassavetes five-film set, *America Lost and Found: the BBS Story*, the list goes on...). And I shouldn't forget those entertaining TV series like *Archer*, *Justified*, *The Honeymooners* and *I Love Lucy* – some region-locked, some not, but all providing great viewing pleasure.

In the increasingly global world that we live in, it's wonderful to be able to shop so freely, the only constraints being finding the time →

Win! Three great Blu-rays up for grabs

Just email your answer to Competitions@homecinemachoice.com to be in with a chance



Pompeii 3D

Mixing together elements of the disaster and swords 'n' sandals genres, *Pompeii 3D* is a must for films fans with a taste for epic spectacle. To celebrate the recent DVD, Blu-ray and 3D

Blu-ray release, EntertainmentOne has given us five copies of the 3D Blu-ray to give away.

Question:

Pompeii director Paul W.S. Anderson is married to which actress?

Answer:

- A)** Mila Kunis **B)** Milla Jovovich
C) Sienna Miller

Email your answer with '**Pompeii**' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



The Wind Rises

Based on the true story of Japanese aeronautic engineer Jiro Horikoshi, the final film by animation legend Hayao (Spirited Away) Miyazaki touches down on DVD and Double-

Play Blu-ray on September 29 courtesy of StudioCanal. And we're giving away five copies of the Double-Play Blu-ray edition.

Question:

What is the name of the famous animation studio that Miyazaki co-founded?

Answer:

- A)** Studio Ghibli **B)** Aardman Animations
C) Walt Disney Animation Studios

Email your answer with '**Wind**' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



The 'Burbs

Joe Dante's iconic '80s comedy *The 'Burbs* is the latest cult classic to join Arrow Video's lineup of feature-packed Blu-rays. Available to buy now as both a regular Blu-ray and

limited edition steelbook, we've got five copies of *The 'Burbs* Blu-ray up for grabs.

Question:

Which of the following films was not directed by Joe Dante?

Answer:

- A)** *Howling II: Your Sister is a Werewolf*
B) *Gremlins 2: The New Batch*
C) *Looney Tunes: Back in Action*

Email your answer with '**Burbs**' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!

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WIN A Denon AVR-X2100W home cinema receiver



Thanks to integrated Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, plus under-the-hood tweaks, Denon's new AV receiver caters for both your home cinema and music streaming needs

The AVR-X2100W is the latest mid-range receiver from home cinema stalwart Denon, bringing with it a raft of performance, feature and user experience upgrades. And we've got one to give away to a lucky reader!

A 7.2-channel design, featuring discrete 150W amplifiers, the AVR-X2100W has undergone intensive sound-tuning in Europe, with the help of UK engineers. Components, including vibration-damping feet, shield-plated switching transformers and decoupling capacitors, have been cherry-picked to ensure performance stability and sonic clarity. And this

internal attention-to-detail is complemented by a premium fascia design with hairline finish.

Fully-featured

The AVR-X2100W's feature set is as generous as the price point is tempting. HDMI connectivity extends to eight inputs (one front-mounted) and two outputs, enabling system flexibility and dual-screen support. 4K passthrough up to 60p and with full 4:4:4 colour sampling is also offered. And integrated Bluetooth and Wi-Fi (plus Spotify Connect, Apple AirPlay and DLNA compatibility) make

this £500 receiver a genuine networked audio solution, with hi-res FLAC, WAV, DSD, ALAC and AIFF files all playable.

Then there's the user experience. For 2014 Denon has completely revamped its menu system (and app controller), to enable faster source selection and less head-scratching for AV novices. Speaker calibration, via Audyssey's MultEQ XT, is also improved courtesy of an extendable mic stand to ensure greater accuracy at the listening position.

On sale now for £500, we have one Denon AVR-X2100W to dish out. So what are you waiting for?

Question:

In 2010, Denon celebrated which landmark anniversary?

Answer:

- A) 50 years
- B) 75 years
- C) 100 years

Email your answer, plus your name and full address, to: Competitions@homecinemachoice.com – with 'Denon' as the subject



For more information on the Denon AVR-X2100W visit: www.denon.co.uk

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to view all those purchases and, of course, keeping an eye on the bank balance.

Rob Cawthorne, via email

Mark Craven replies: Yes, the internet – and a credit card – can be a dangerous thing if you're a software addict. My colleague Anton van Beek has been known to pre-order so many Blu-rays and DVDs that the office postman arrives in a dump-truck...

Region-coding has long been a home cinema niggle, but with studios seemingly a little more relaxed about controlled distribution than they once were, and 'net-based retailers getting ever more slick and user-friendly, the situation in 2014 is an improvement on, say, 10-12 years ago. Would you have been able to get that *Columbo* cigar-box special edition from Japan before Amazon became ubiquitous? Perhaps not.

Oh, and send us some pictures of your disc shelf!

CRT projector for 4K?

I am very surprised the Epson EH-TW9200 projector was awarded Best European HT Projector by EISA, because I had a demo of this very model a few weeks ago and was totally underwhelmed. Could this be because I have been using a CRT PJ for the past 13 years, capable of lifelike images and pure blacks? Have people's viewing expectations been dumbed down in favour of size and convenience?

Unfortunately, my Barco 808s projector has now gone to the home cinema in the sky and I was looking for a budget PJ to tide me over until I move and create a new cinema room. The Epson EH-TW7200 was actually the model on my list to view but the dealer only had the TW9200 model on demo and assured me the 7200 was very close in PQ terms. However, if I am not impressed by a projector retailing for about £2,700 what am I to do? I am now thinking I may have to import another CRT machine from America for my new cinema room and deal with the high noise level and heat output on installation. A high-performance



Epson's EH-TW9200 – less cumbersome than a CRT projector

CRT projector naturally capable of 4K (my old intermediate model manufactured in 1996 could do 1080p no probs) with low mileage can be bought for about the equivalent of £2,700 and I believe imported for about £400. Something to think about, eh? *Terry Catlin, via email*

Martin Pipe replies: Certainly, before technologies like DLP arrived, CRT projectors ruled the projection roost. LCD projectors have been around since the late 1980s, but pictures from early designs were atrocious with a coarse resolution and the notorious 'chicken-wire' effect. So, the vast majority of PJs in use – certainly until the early part of the 2000s – were CRT types.

A quick refresher course for those who've forgotten: these PJs employed separate optical systems for the red, green and blue elements of the picture. Behind them lay high-brightness cathode ray tubes; high-end units employed 9in types, with more modest units based around 7in or 8in varieties.

CRT-based projection systems were found in lecture theatres, commercial airliners, industrial control rooms and the best home cinemas. There was nothing to touch them for the latter application if you wanted an image of truly cinematic proportions in the 1990s. Remember that the era's most popular choice of domestic TV screen-size was 21in!

The problem with a CRT projector was that its three images needed to correspond

with each other – a process known as convergence. Fail to get this right, and you'd end up with colour fringing and loss of resolution. Adjusting convergence (along with picture geometry and other matters) during installation was a specialist task, and periodic recalibration was required. You also had to be careful to avoid bright static images to avoid screenburn. And CRT projectors had a 4:3 aspect ratio, which meant that widescreen movies were shown letterbox-style, leading to uneven wear of the tubes' phosphors. To get around this, those with plenty of money would employ two identical PJs, rigidly-positioned and driven via a scaler/processor/switcher, for widescreen movies. Each showed half of the image, and setup was critical if the 'join' was to be hidden. An advantage of this multiple PJ approach was higher overall resolution.

The best CRT PJs benefitted from aftermarket HDMI or DVI retrofits, although it was more usual to use them via RGBHV analogue with scalars equipped with DVI/HDMI inputs. Even by today's standards (especially via models like the BarcoReality 909 or Sony's G90) picture quality can be sublime. Set up properly, you can expect a fantastic black level with vivid and natural colours, a wide contrast range and complete freedom from pixel structure.

For die-hards, the performance advantages of CRT outweighed the high power consumption, cooling-fan noise/

heat and maintenance requirements. And, yes, a number of enthusiasts remain loyal to the CRT cause; your experiences and opinions are not unique. Yet as CRT projectors are no longer made, disciples struggle to keep their older hardware going. As is the case with your Barco 808s.

UHD/4K is certainly possible with CRT projection, but not ideal. You would need to actually find a compatible processor with HDMI 2.0 inputs – a professional device that would be rather expensive. A more affordable approach could be built from a high-end PC, HDMI capture hardware, multiple high-end graphics cards and suitable software. Then you'll need at least two high-res CRT projectors (like the aforementioned BarcoReality 909) configured to work together in widescreen mode. PJs of this quality turn up occasionally second-hand, but we'd have to advise against it if you're serious about 4K. There are concerns beyond mere resolution – including refresh rates and connectivity – that mean 4K enthusiasts are best catered for by modern tech! ■

CONTACT US...

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FILM FRANCHISE

Terminator

We travel through time to celebrate the series that taught us all to fear the machine...



Whether villain or hero, the Terminator remains Arnie's most famous role...



OUR ONGOING RELATIONSHIP with technology, and the notion of humanity eventually being usurped by its own creations, has proved fertile ground for science-fiction writers and filmmakers over

Summer Glau played TV's *Terminatrix*

the years – and few have tackled the subject with as much efficiency as James Cameron did in his 1984 film *The Terminator*. Telling the frightening tale of a robotic assassin sent back in time to kill a woman destined to be the mother of the leader of a human resistance in a future war against the machines (and... breathe), it was made for just \$6.4million, but hit a nerve with audiences around the world and went on to coin \$78million at the box office. And in the process, *The Terminator* made both Cameron and his leading man/

walking muscle Arnold Schwarzenegger part of the Hollywood 'A-list'.

'The future is not set...'

While both had huge success with subsequent individual projects, Cameron and Schwarzenegger seemed at their very best when working together. This was more than borne out by 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* – a blockbuster sequel with a worldwide gross of almost \$520million that recast Arnie's silicon baddie as an automated babysitter.



Near miss: Cameron originally had Lance Henriksen in mind for the title role in *The Terminator* and had him turn up in a leather jacket with gold foil on his teeth while pitching the film to Orion Pictures.

Theme park: James Cameron, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Linda Hamilton, Edward Furlong and Robert Patrick reunited for the *T2 3D: Battle Across Time* interactive attraction at Universal Studios parks.



Yet a third movie in the franchise lacked both Cameron's involvement and the previous films' sense of excitement, unless you think the introduction of a female Terminator is something radical. *Terminator: Salvation*, which dropped Schwarzenegger entirely (beyond some CGI), took the franchise in a new, but not entirely successful, direction.

Yet the Terminator always promised 'I'll be back' and Arnie will be returning in *Terminator: Genisys* next Summer. Fingers crossed that it will capture the spirit of the original.

PICK OF THE BEST...

1 The Terminator

Brimming with suspense and tension, James Cameron's seminal 1984 sci-fi action flick is every bit as ruthless and efficient as Arnold Schwarzenegger's cyborg slayer. Not just the best in the series, but also the best film that both Cameron and Schwarzenegger have ever made.

2 Terminator 2: Judgement Day

A key film in the evolution of the modern blockbuster, *T2* replaces the streamlined storytelling of the original with a procession of spectacular action scenes, state-of-the-art special effects and a heavy-handed anti-nuke message. Great fun.

3 The Sarah Connor Chronicles

This TV spin-off may have been cancelled after just two seasons, but during that time it proved to be more complex and far more entertaining than either of the post-Cameron movie sequels. And in Summer Glau the franchise arguably found its most interesting Terminator to date.

AND THE WORST...

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines

One of the last flicks Arnie made before kicking back as Governor of California, this threequel – minus a couple of FX-heavy set-pieces – is curiously dull, with a plot that retreads parts of the first two with little enthusiasm. It's only the final moments, where John Connor begins to lead the resistance, that stay in the memory.

COLLECTIBLES

No self-respecting Terminator fan can afford to miss out on these...

T-800 Endoskeleton [v2.0]



Sideshow Collectibles has just released its second life-size version of the T-800 Endoskeleton as seen in *Terminator 2*. The statue stands over six-feet tall, features light-up eyes and will set you back around \$6,000.

La Boca Terminator poster



This official new poster for *The Terminator* by West London's La Boca design studio was produced to celebrate the movie's 30th anniversary and was sold exclusively at this year's San Diego Comic Con.

Terminator 2 Pinball Machine



Released by Williams Electronics in the Summer of 1991, this cutting-edge table was the first to use a dot-matrix display to play a video mini-game and featured various interactive features.

RoboCop Versus Terminator



This four issue mini-series by Frank Miller and Walt Simonson is the best Terminator comic book spin-off by some distance. While it initially sounds daft, the crossover ultimately makes perfect sense and delivers plenty of action.

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION...

The very best of the Terminator series available to buy on disc...

Terminator 2: Ultimate Edition (R1 DVD)

The Terminator: Special Edition (R2 DVD)

The Terminator Collection (R2 DVD)

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (R2 DVD)

The Terminator: Definitive Edition (R2 DVD)

Terminator 2: Ultimate HD Edition

(HD DVD – German Import)

Terminator 2 (Region B BD)

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (All-region BD)

Terminator 2: Skynet Edition (Region B BD)

Terminator 2: Skynet Edition [Steelbook] (Region B BD)

Terminator 2: Skynet Edition [Play.com-exclusive Endoskull] (Region B BD)

Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles – Seasons 1 & 2 (All-region BD)

Terminator Salvation: Director's Cut (All-region BD)

Terminator Salvation [Limited edition T-600 packaging] (All-region BD)

Terminator Salvation [Endoskull box] (All-region BD)



Terminator Salvation [Moto-Terminator Blu-ray Edizione Limitata] (All-region BD – Italian Import)

Terminator Salvation: The Machinima Series (R2 DVD)

Terminator: Quadrilogy (R2 DVD)

The Terminator (All-region BD)

Terminator Anthology (Region A BD – US Import)



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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **POMPEII 3D** Can top-notch stereoscopic visuals add extra depth to this historical disaster movie? **THE WIND RISES** Hayao Miyazaki's animated swan song breezes in **BLACK SAILS** TV pirates set sail for adventure on the deep Blu sea **THE 'BURBS** Cult '80s comedy gets the deluxe treatment **WOLF CREEK 2** Hi-def horror from the land down under **AND MUCH MORE!**



Marvel's cold war

Captain America: The Winter Soldier 3D → Walt Disney → All-region BD

Everything you thought you knew about the Marvel cinematic universe is turned upside down in Captain America's second solo outing... We check out the Blu-ray on p98.

HCC RATINGS KEY...	
Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

This pair of gladiators always knew how to bring the house down



Anderson goes off with a bang

Stereoscopic historical disaster flick delivers plenty of spectacle, but struggles to make us care

→ POMPEII 3D

Director Paul W.S. Anderson takes a break from zombies and mutants for this historical disaster movie recounting the destruction of the titular Roman city. Thrust into the heart of this volcanic maelstrom are slave/gladiator/horse whisperer Milo (Kit Harrington) and Cassia (Emily Browning) the young noble woman whose eye he catches.

When it comes to scenes of gladiatorial action and epic destruction, *Pompeii* really delivers the goods. Unfortunately, the journey there is rather less exciting, with Anderson once again showcasing his tin ear for dialogue and inability to engage with characters on any level that doesn't involve people trying to kill one another. So, while Milo works as part of a likeable double-team with fellow gladiator Atticus (Adewale Akinnouye-Agbaje), there's zero chemistry between him and Cassia, robbing the film of the emotional spine that is supposed to hold it all together. And don't even get us started on Kiefer Sutherland's frankly bizarre performance as the villain of the piece.

In other words, *Pompeii* is a film of two halves. The first is a terrible love story with some gladiatorial fights, the other the epic disaster movie we were promised. Only you can decide whether it's worth persevering with the former to get to the latter.

Picture: Whatever his other shortcomings as a filmmaker, with two *Resident Evils*, *The Three Musketeers* and now *Pompeii* under his belt, Anderson is one of the most experienced practitioners of 3D cinema working in Hollywood today. This latest



Guess which aspect of the film had more effort put into it – the script or the SFX?



HCC VERDICT

Pompeii 3D

→ EntertainmentOne

→ Region B BD → £25 Approx

WE SAY: Not as much fun as its *Gladiator-meets-Earthquake* concept suggests, but still worth a rent at least

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

film continues to demonstrate that few other directors have such an innate understanding of the possibilities of the form.

From twisting tree branches to clouds of ash drifting through the air, almost every single frame of the Blu-ray's MVC 2.40:1 1080p encode boasts a convincing sense of three-dimensional space.

The 'flat' AVC 2.40:1 1080p 2D presentation is just as impressive from a technical point of view – even if it lacks a little of the 3D version's wow-factor. Colours pop from the screen, black levels are solid and the faultless clarity of the image ensures that detailing is meticulous. Awesome.

Audio: *Pompeii*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack builds an immersive soundstage with its atmospheric effects, clear dialogue and rich music presentation. Naturally, things start to heat up from Chapter 9 onwards when Vesuvius erupts. From this point on you're in traditional disaster flick territory, and the sound design demos some precise steering, potent dynamics and room-rumbling LFE.

Extras: The first extra is a commentary from Anderson and producer Jeremy Bolt. The pair are old hands at this now, and provide an effortless guide to the making of the film and its historical background.

Also on offer are 20 deleted scenes, six short featurettes focusing on specific aspects of the production (cast, set design, costumes, visual effects, gladiator training and weapons), and a more general 24-minute *Making of...* documentary.

Unusually the full array of extras is replicated on the set's 2D and 3D platters.

Locke

Lionsgate → Region B BD
£23 Approx



A film that consists of nothing more than a man driving along a motorway talking on the phone? It may sound like the dumbest idea ever, but in the hands of writer-director Steven Knight and the always impressive actor Tom Hardy, *Locke* proves to be a fascinating and utterly compelling depiction of a life falling apart. This Blu-ray sports a very stylish 2.40:1 1080p encode that gets the best it can from the digital photography (despite the usual issues with blacks in low-light situations). Extras consist of a fascinating *Making of...* and commentary track.



Sabotage

Lionsgate → Region B BD
£23 Approx



Schwarzenegger's career comeback hits a serious speedbump with this scuzzy thriller from *Training Day* writer David Ayer. While it starts promisingly, this tale of missing drug money and corrupt DEA agents becomes more and more preposterous, before paying off with a climax that seems to have been dragged in from a completely different movie. Yet while the flick itself is a dud, this BD fares well with its razor-sharp, blisteringly colourful 1.85:1-framed 1080p imagery and immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. Extras include eight deleted scenes and two alternate endings.



Brick Mansions

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£23 Approx



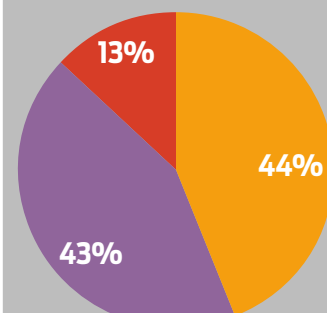
A surprisingly late remake of the 2004 French action film *District 13*, this pairs the late Paul Walker with original star and Parkour pioneer David Belle. As likeable as the leads are, they're utterly wasted here; *Brick Mansions* lacks the freshness of the original and is hamstrung by choppy editing and Hollywood's fascination with casting rapper-turned-actor RZA in major roles he doesn't have the chops to pull off. And while the Blu-ray platter itself looks and sounds absolutely first-rate, it's hard to think of a less impressive array of extras than the meagre offerings included.



WE ASKED...

What did you make of 2014's slate of Summer blockbusters?

Great, the stuff AV dreams are made of Meh... no better or worse than usual Absolutely awful!



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action



Animation soars to new heights

Spirited Away creator's final film bends the biopic genre to good effect

→ THE WIND RISES

The final film by Japanese animation legend Hayao Miyazaki steps away from the supernatural and fantasy elements that has typified his best known work for a bittersweet tale based on the life-story of aeronautical engineer Jiro Horikoshi.

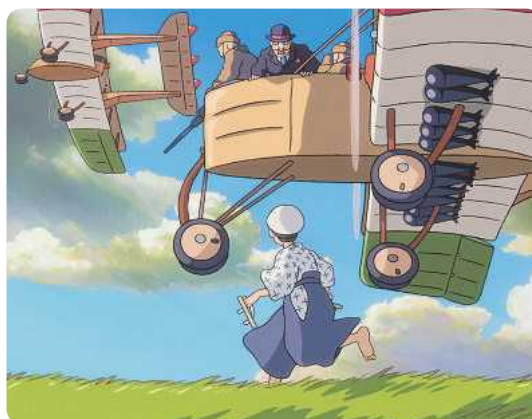
However, rather than give us a straightforward biography, Miyazaki instead serves up a fictionalised version of Horikoshi's life. An unusual step, certainly, but it helps *The Wind Rises* break free of the shackles of the biopic genre and lets it explore more deeply some central themes – including a celebration of the creative process and the way in which it can be distorted and corrupted by human folly.

As is typical of Miyazaki, the result is a majestic piece of cinema that reaches heights that many animators can only dream of attaining.

Picture: *The Wind Rises* lands on Blu-ray with a 1080p AVC encode framed at the original 1.85:1 aspect ratio that gets the best out of this visually striking animated feature. Vibrant primaries sit comfortably alongside more subtle water-colour-style backgrounds, while the linework is rendered with impeccable sharpness and delineation. Everything a Ghibli fan could hope for.

Audio: The first thing to note about *The Wind Rises*' soundtrack is that Miyazaki insisted on the creation of a mono mix for the film. As such, both the original Japanese language track and the English dub are offered as LPCM 2.0 dual-mono.

This may disappoint home cinema fans surrounded by a phalanx of speakers, but trust us, this mix remains a work of art. The clarity and



dynamic range evident in the track is impressive, showing what a modern mono track is capable of, and its focused nature draws increased attention to the movie's unusual sound design, with human vocalisations replacing traditional audio effects during a number of key scenes.

Extras: The bonus bits here are worth a look. First up is a picture-in-picture storyboard mode for the entire film, a mainstay across the Studio Ghibli Blu-ray range. The disc also features the clumsily-titled *Press Conference for the Announcement of the Completion of the Film*. Featuring Miyazaki, voice artist Hideaki Anno and singer-songwriter Yumi Matsutoya fielding questions from the press, this surprisingly lengthy (89-minute) video actually does a decent job of digging into the film's production.

The Blu-ray also includes a reel of four TV spots and the UK theatrical trailer, and comes accompanied by a bonus DVD copy.



HCC VERDICT

The Wind Rises

→ StudioCanal → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25 Approx

WE SAY: A triumphant finale to a spectacular career given the treatment it deserves on Blu-ray

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



In salute of Marvel's Captain

Superior sequel mixes old-school conspiracy thrills with modern superhero action



The cybernetic assassin known only as the Winter Soldier (top) is more than a match for Cap and Black Widow (above)

→ CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER 3D

Even taking into account the success it's had to date, 2014 should go down as Marvel Studio's biggest and most exciting year. And not just because of the surprise Summer sci-fi smash *Guardians of the Galaxy*; several months earlier Marvel had turned everything fans thought they knew about its shared cinematic universe on its head with this edgy second solo outing for Captain America.

Taking its cues primarily from 1970s paranoid conspiracy thrillers in the mould of *Three Days of the Condor*, the film sees Captain America (Chris Evans) going on the run with Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) and new chum Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie), after he becomes the target of rogue elements within the previously benevolent security agency S.H.I.E.L.D. Along the way it introduces a mysterious assassin with a link to Cap's past and confronts topical concerns such as global security and its potential impact on personal freedom.

The above plot outline only hints at how *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is a more hard-edged and complex take on the superhero genre than anything the studio has produced up to this point. But don't think for a minute that the darker mood takes the franchise in the direction of Chris Nolan's *Batman* movies. Directors Anthony and Joe Russo keep the pace ticking over in fine comic book style, balancing the multi-layered storytelling with breathtaking action beats and plenty of sparkling dialogue, no doubt aided by the Russos' prior experience on sitcoms including *Arrested Development* and *Community*.

Is it perfect then? Not quite. The story is so intertwined with other Marvel movies that it doesn't work as well as a standalone flick. Latecomers to the party could be baffled. Additionally, the titular supervillain is lacking in depth. Yet the latter is something Marvel film fans are getting used to – and they'll be too busy wondering in which direction the series will head next to care.

Picture: Disney's 3D Blu-ray release splits the 'flat' and stereoscopic versions across separate platters.

Unsurprisingly, the 2D AVC-encoded 2.40:1 1080p presentation is a zinger. Many colours are rather subdued, to match the overall mood of the story, but saturation remains excellent in more vibrant tones (such as Black Widow's shampoo-ad hair). Meanwhile, dark areas of the image harbour a wealth of shadow detail, and there's



Eat your heart out Evel Knievel!

no trace of artefacting, mosquito noise, colour banding or other encoding issues to spoil your enjoyment.

While the 2D Blu-ray encode is a real five-star effort, the same cannot be said for Disney's stereoscopic version. As with Marvel's previous 3D flicks, the film was shot flat and converted in post-production – and the results this time are clearly hamstrung by the film's darker aesthetic.

The night raid on the *Lemurian Star* (Chapter 2) sees the already dark exterior shots of the S.H.I.E.L.D. Quinjet flying through clouds rendered almost unintelligible by the additional drop in brightness. Things barely improve when the action moves to the deck, with long-shots of Cap taking out enemy goons still lacking clarity and definition.

The quality picks up quite a bit in brighter sequences, but even then it's only really in a handful of shots of Sam Wilson being chased by a Quinjet as he flies around a S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarrier (Chapter 14) that the stereoscopic enhancement makes any serious impact. So do yourself and your home cinema a favour and stick to the 2D version.

Audio: Another Disney disc armed with a stonking DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack. ...*The Winter Soldier* isn't as action-packed as some blockbuster rivals, but there are more than enough set-pieces here to keep your speakers fed a diet of energetic effects, swift pans and punishing bass. And away from the action the audio team works hard to fill the soundfield with ambient effects that place you amidst the paranoia, while Henry Jackman's original score, which mixes orchestral instrumentation with electronic flourishes, will set your spine-tingling.

Extras: Disappointingly, there's no *Marvel One-Shot* short film this time out (boo!). You do get an engaging commentary from the filmmakers, four deleted/extended scenes (with optional commentary), three short featurettes and a gag reel, but a movie this good deserves something a bit more in-depth.



HCC VERDICT

Captain America: The Winter Soldier 3D

→ Walt Disney

→ All-region BD → £28 Approx

WE SAY: Superior superhero sequel lands a solid HD package

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

DEMO SCREEN...

Captain America: The Winter Soldier

Time code: 076.22 – 083.54



Flipping heck! Captain America, Black Widow and Falcon are ambushed by the Winter Soldier and his goons, who kick off their attack by flipping the heroes' car through the air.



Feel the Heat: The DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix showcases plenty of surround effects as the Winter Soldier's team pin down the good guys in a sequence that owes a debt to the street shootout from *Heat*.



Bouncing bullets: The precision and clarity of steering in the soundtrack becomes even more apparent as Cap uses his shield to deflect a barrage of bullet's unleashed by a mini-gun-wielding soldier.



Pulling no punches: All of this was merely the warm-up for the moment when Captain America and the Winter Soldier finally go toe-to-toe, delivering epic LFE with every blow that lands.

This latest Marvel movie takes many of its cues from '70s conspiracy thrillers

NOVEMBER 2014 HOME CINEMA CHOICE

ARCADE ACTION

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

Risen 3: Titan Lords

Deep Silver → Xbox 360/PS3 → £50 Approx



The role-playing genre has undergone a pretty major shift in recent years, with the *Elder Scrolls* and *Dragon Age* franchises bringing things closer to the realm of action-adventure. *Risen 3: Titan Lords* continues in the same vein, but ultimately lacks the polish that made those earlier titles so popular.



Mixing together the fantasy and pirate genres, *Risen 3: Titan Lords* finds players exploring tropical islands while undertaking an epic journey to reunite their body with their soul (a long story involving death, resurrection and ancient evil). Naturally, this boils down to a number of quests that serve to bolster your character's stats (of which there are plenty to keep an eye on) through exploration and combat. However, unlike many of its contemporaries, the process of levelling-up here requires you to seek out specific characters to teach you new skills, which feels like nothing more than a way of extending the game's life span.

Other problems stem from slightly fussy combat and graphical glitches. But for those gamers who can overlook these niggles and embrace the game's role-playing fundamentals, *Risen 3: Titan Lords* can be a fairly enjoyable experience. At the very least, it should keep genre fans going until *Dragon Age: Inquisition* hits shelves in a couple of months...



Sacred 3

Deep Silver → Xbox 360/PS3 → £38 Approx



While the previous two instalments in the *Sacred* series were pretty full-on action role-playing games, Deep Silver's latest sequel has mostly ditched all of the RPG elements in favour of four-player monster-slaying that harks back to old-skool favourite *Gauntlet*. Unfortunately, *Sacred 3* has none of the charm, immediacy or

addictive qualities that made Atari's 1985 game such a hit in the arcades and at home.



Things take a pretty bad turn from the off as *Sacred 3* introduces players to its particular brand of painfully forced and unfunny comedy. Presumably recognising that the button-bashing gameplay itself was as basic as it comes, the developer appears to have decided that *Sacred 3* should lampoon the tropes of the fantasy genre. Rather than build this notion into the game itself, it's done by having characters constantly chatting while you're playing, filling your speakers with childish jokes and inane asides.

But even this constant jabbering in your ear fails to make the experience of playing *Sacred 3* any less monotonous. Regardless of the various locations on offer and the reasonably attractive graphical flourishes that accompany magical effects, it remains a one-trick pony. And, as that trick is hammering away at buttons until your thumbs bleed, it's not even a fun trick at that.



The Two Faces of January

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£23 Approx



Viggo Mortensen, Kirsten Dunst and Oscar Isaac star in this deceptively relaxed thriller based on a novel by Patricia Highsmith. Expertly executed and performed, the film makes

an added impression on Blu-ray thanks to the gorgeous 1080p rendering of its lush cinematography and locales. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack is understandably low-key, while quality extras included picture-in-picture storyboards for the entire film, interviews, deleted scenes and a trio of featurettes.



Sons of Anarchy: Season 6

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£40 Approx



There are very few series that maintain an exceptional level of quality over half a decade, so the idea that a show could be doing its best work that far into its life span seems impossible.

That's exactly the case with Kurt Sutter's thrilling drama about the SAMCRO bike gang, though, which hits a new high with this unpredictable and frequently shocking sixth season. Fox's four-disc Blu-ray package continues the quality of its predecessors with crisp AVC 1.78:1 1080p visuals, effective DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics and an enjoyable (if not huge) assortment of extras.



Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season One

Universal Pictures → R2 DVD
£30 Approx



Given the popularity of cop shows and workplace sitcoms it was inevitable that somebody would combine the two. Less expected was that the resulting show would be this good, giving

viewers 22 episodes packed with a rich ensemble of characters (led by Adam Samberg's goofy, pop culture-savvy detective Jake Peralta) and a surfeit of laugh-out loud gags. This four-disc DVD release boasts attractive anamorphic 1.78:1 transfers, but is let down by poor extras – just a 24-minute reel of deleted scenes.



How to settle your differences, pirate-style...



Set sail for smallscreen success

While we don't normally approve of piracy, in this case we're making an exception...

→ **BLACK SAILS: COMPLETE SERIES ONE**

Set several decades before the events depicted in Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novel *Treasure Island*, this cracking new period drama follows the exploits of Captain James Flint (Toby Stephens) and his crew of pirates – including a scheming new cook called John Silver (Luke Arnold).

In need of one big score, Flint sets his sights on the heavily-armed Spanish treasure galleon, *Urca de Lima*. But before he can attempt that he needs to win the support of local black marketeer Eleanor Guthrie (Hannah New) and deal with all manner of unexpected threats to his captaincy.

So batten down your hatches and get ready for eight episodes of buccaneer brilliance...

Picture: Primarily set on the sun-soaked island of Nassau (and shot at South Africa's Cape Town Film Studios), this first season of *Black Sails* makes a strong visual impact on Blu-ray, with decent clarity and definition to its 1.78:1-framed 1080p imagery.

As with Starz's earlier historical hit *Spartacus*, the amount of fine detail present in the image is very impressive. But unlike that heavily-stylised series, the colour saturation and contrast levels here are much more naturalistic.

Image clarity drops off slightly when the action moves to the dingy interiors of the ships, and there's some black crush



evident here and in some night scenes. But these are fairly minor flaws in an otherwise exemplary hi-def presentation.

Audio: Studio Starz doesn't have the same production budgets as HBO, and *Black Sails* can't compete with *Game of Thrones*, let alone the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, when it comes to audio prowess. But judged on their own merits, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks here are difficult to fault.

The use of the surround channels is somewhat unadventurous, but there's still plenty of separation in the mix and strong dynamics. Dialogue reproduction is faultless, and it would be remiss not to mention how expertly the discs handle composer Bear McCreary's hurdy gurdy-infused score.

Extras: There's no buried treasure to be found here. Indeed, beyond the show itself, all this four-disc set has to offer are six brief behind-the-scenes featurettes that were clearly made to promote the series online.

Building the Behemoth (two minutes) looks at the construction of the main pirate ship; *Dress to Kill* (two minutes) focuses on the costumes; *Pirate Camp* (two minutes) looks at the 'pirate training' the cast underwent; *Black Sails: An Inside Look* (nine minutes) is a generic *Making of...* promo; *Folklore is Finished* (three minutes) explores pirate politics; and *A Place in History* (two minutes) looks at slavery during the era. Argggghhhhh.



The series really pushes the boat out when it comes to visual effects



HCC VERDICT

Black Sails: Complete Series One

→ Anchor Bay → Region B BD

→ £40 Approx

WE SAY: A solid Blu-ray debut for this pirate drama. We'd appreciate a few more extras for future seasons

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★★★★

'What do you mean we're dragging the boat up the wrong mountain?'



Tales of everyday madness

The BFI celebrates the work of Germany's most important contemporary filmmaker with style



François Truffaut once called Herzog 'the most important film director alive'



HCC VERDICT

The Werner Herzog Collection

→ BFI → Region B BD

→ £80 Approx

WE SAY: A stonking boxset for a great filmmaker. Here's hoping that more Herzog is on the way to Blu-ray soon

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

→ THE WERNER HERZOG COLLECTION

For more than four decades German filmmaker Werner Herzog has been one of the most fascinating figures in European cinema. Working in the worlds of both fiction and documentary (even if he's notorious for staging scenes in his non-fiction films for the benefit of what he calls an 'ecstatic truth') Herzog has produced countless beguiling movies that run the gamut from historical adventures and studies of mirages to a Nic Cage cop movie and 3D portraits of ancient cave paintings.

This eight-disc set focuses on the first half of Herzog's career and brings together no less than 18 feature films, shorts and documentaries made between 1967 and 1987. It takes in *The Unprecedented Defence of Fortress Deutschkreuz* (1967), *Last Words* (1968), *Precautions Against Fanatics* (1969), *Handicapped Future* (1970), *Fata Morgana* (1971), *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971), *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972), *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner* (1975), *Heart of Glass* (1976), *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* (1976), *Stroszek* (1977), *Nosferatu, the Vampyre* (1979), *Woyzeck* (1979), *Huie's Sermon* (1980), *God's Angry Men* (1980), *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and *Cobra Verde* (1987).

While there are some notable omissions (such as his debut feature, 1968's *Signs of Life*), this boxset remains an indispensable addition to a cinephile's disc library.

Picture: As you can probably tell from the fact that it includes just eight discs, the 18 films here frequently share a hi-def platter. However, no matter whether the disc in question is a housing two-and-a-half-hour epic (*Fitzcarraldo*), two versions of the same film (*Nosferatu, the Vampyre*), one feature and several shorts, or even a couple of features, the image quality remains strong.

As good as the restorations are, though, the real hero is the disc authoring, which ensures that no sacrifice has been made in transferring material shot using a variety of film stocks. It all looks utterly authentic; a fantastic effort from all involved in what was clearly a mammoth undertaking.

Audio: All of the films in the set are presented with LPCM versions of their original mono audio (except *Cobra Verde*, which was made in stereo), in both German and English where separate tracks exist. All have been cleaned-up and are free from any notable hiss or other distortion.

Four films (*Aguirre...*, *Nosferatu...*, *Fitzcarraldo* and *Cobra Verde*) also include DTS-HD MA 5.1 remixes of the original German soundtracks, although don't expect too much in the way of surround effects.

Extras: Herzog is joined by critic Norman Hill (and Crispin Glover on one occasion) for commentaries for all but two of the feature films in the set (*Land of Silence and Darkness* and *Woyzeck*).

Also on offer is *Burden of Dreams*, the feature-length doc about the making of *Fitzcarraldo*, a *South Bank Show* special, a video of Herzog eating his own shoe after he lost a bet(!) and much more.

Madame Dubarry

Eureka! Masters of Cinema
Region B BD & R2 DVD → £23 Approx



Ernst Lubitsch directs this 1919 German silent film about the rise and fall of King Louis XV of France's chief

mistress. It's an interesting slice of silent melodrama and this Blu-ray release serves it rather well. Despite plenty of scratches, the image clarity and detailing shows that a lot of work has been put into restoring the almost-100-year-old film – although it's a shame that the efforts of censors at the time mean we'll probably now never see the movie's ending as it was originally shot. The sole disc-based extra is Lubitsch's once believed lost 1916 short *Als Ich Tot War*.



Black Narcissus

Network → Region B BD
£15 Approx



This latest hi-def outing for Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1947 study of repressed desire and emotional

turmoil amongst the Nuns in a Himalayan convent is a must for anyone who didn't pull the trigger on importing Criterion's Region A-locked 2010 Blu-ray. The 1.33:1 1080p presentation perfectly captures the beauty of Jack Cardiff's celebrated Three-Strip Technicolor photography, while extras include a chat-track by Martin Scorsese and Michael Powell, a 26-minute extract from a documentary about Jack Cardiff and more than 500 behind-the-scenes and promo photographs.



The 400 Blows

Artificial Eye → Region B BD
£23 Approx



Regularly hailed as one of the cornerstones of the French New Wave movement, director Fran  ois Truffaut's

semi-autobiographical debut feature is a vibrant and honest film about childhood. While this release is a little lacking in extras (there's just a trio of screentests, a video intro and an audio commentary by Truffaut's childhood friend and co-director Robert Lachenay), it's very hard to fault the AV presentation. The black-and-white AVC 2.35:1 1080p imagery boasts plenty of depth and detail, while the French LPCM 2.0 dual-mono mix does a fine job handling dialogue.



The Beast

Arrow Academy → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £23 Approx



Best known for a lengthy and outrageous dream sequence in which a woman is ravaged by a monster,

Walerian Borowczyk's notorious 1975 film *The Beast* is still shocking today, if not more than a little ludicrous. While the film has been uncut on DVD in the UK since 2001, this new Blu-ray still proves particularly eye-opening thanks to its beautifully restored 1.66:1 transfer. Almost an hour's worth of behind-the-scenes footage with commentary, a gallery of design sketches and ideas for a sequel, and a 32-page collection of essays, are among the considered array of extras.



Neighbourhood watch gone wrong

Dante's delicious tale of paranoia, xenophobia benefits from extra attentions

→ THE 'BURBS

Deep in sleepy suburbia, Ray (Tom Hanks) and his neighbours begin to wonder if the recent (foreign) arrivals in their cul-de-sac are up to no good. Egged on by his friends' fanciful imaginations, the sight of people digging holes in the middle of the night and some strange noises from their basement, Ray is soon investigating the possibility that his neighbours are serial murderers. Is he right, or has a lifetime of small-town living turned him paranoid?

Joe Dante's 1989 darkly comic tale has gained a cult following over the years. Insanely funny but shot through with a macabre sensibility, it's note-perfect. Everything, from Hanks' portrayal of a man descending into madness to the expert pacing and tense, explosive finale, impresses. The sort of movie that Hollywood should make more often...

Picture: Exclusively restored at 2K by Arrow for this lavish Blu-ray release, and with the approval of Joe Dante, *The 'Burbs* 1.85:1 image looks pretty decent considering its vintage, although the picture will seem a little muted compared to contemporary fare. Colours saunter out, rather than pop from the screen, and it's also rather grainy – in some scenes, such as the get-to-know-you session in the Klopek's dimly-lit living room, distractingly so. However, there's a sharpness to the image that teases out the details in the set design and characters faces, and it's clean, without any noticeable print damage or dirt.

Audio: Nothing more fancy here than uncompressed stereo, which works well with Jerry Goldsmith's original score and the quiet, relaxed nature of the film's daytime scenes. A surround mix, to add to



Ray was still suffering from his ice bucket challenge

some of the film's energetic set-pieces, wouldn't go amiss, though.

Extras: This is where fans are truly rewarded. Arrow's single-platter release includes Dante's personal Workprint of the movie (sourced from VHS, never released before), accompanied by a featurette discussing the differences between the two versions, with commentary from the director. Both are well worth a watch. Even better is the fabulously in-depth *Making of...* doc (66 minutes), plus a new commentary for the theatrical release with writer Dana Olsen guided by critic Calum Waddell, a format that keeps the information ticking over. Also offered is the (inferior) alternate ending (in HD), and the original trailer.

Bundled with both the £25 Deluxe release and this £28 limited edition steelbook version (with updated cover art) is a 30-page booklet. All told, there's plenty to savour here.



HCC VERDICT

The 'Burbs

→ Arrow Video

→ Region B BD → £25 Approx

WE SAY: A brilliant comedy given a brilliant Blu-ray release. Brilliant!

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Wolf tracks down fresh victims

Stick another shrimp on the barbie as Outback psycho Mick Taylor is back for seconds

→ WOLF CREEK 2

Greg McLean's 2005 shocker *Wolf Creek* was among the best of the glut of so-called 'survival-horror' films that flooded the market in the last decade.

Despite kicking off with a spectacular sequence where John Jarrett's pig-hunter-cum-serial-killer Mick Taylor (essentially a twisted *Crocodile Dundee*) takes out a couple of cops who pulled him over for speeding, it initially looks like we're in for more of the same, as the focus shifts onto a couple of German hitchhikers who run afoul of Mick. However, this all changes when one of them escapes and is found by pommie surfer Paul (Ryan Corr), who becomes the new focus of Mick's unstoppable rage.

The first *Wolf Creek* was clearly indebted to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*; this belated follow-up seems to take its cues from that film's sequel, playing bigger and broader in terms of scope, gore, action and laughs.

What unfolds isn't on a par with the streamlined thrills of the original, but *Wolf Creek 2* is still a supremely capable slasher that cements Mick Taylor's place as one of the great horror bogeymen of the modern era. Bonzer!

Picture: For the most part, *Wolf Creek 2* is an absolutely beautiful-looking film. Shot mainly using Arri Alexa cameras, the 2.40:1-framed imagery is crisp and intricately detailed, even holding up extremely well under low-light conditions.

Some of the bigger stunts make use of the now ubiquitous GoPro cameras, which don't quite match



'Say "that ain't a knife" again... I dare ya!'



up in terms of quality. But given that these affordable cam were often destroyed in getting the shots McLean wanted, it's an understandable state of affairs.

Audio: *Wolf Creek 2*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is a full-blooded affair that reaches more dynamic heights than we expected, thanks to sequences such as the car crash in Chapter 2 and the truck chase in Chapter 8. Dialogue is also faultlessly reproduced, while use of atmospheric effects across the entire soundstage keeps the sense of horror ticking over.

Extras: In lieu of a commentary, this disc offers up a wonderfully informative 57-minute *Making of...* documentary. Also included are nine deleted scenes, running to a little shy of 26 minutes.

HCC VERDICT

Wolf Creek 2

→ EntertainmentOne

→ Region B BD → £18 Approx

WE SAY: A strong HD showing for a twisted, inventive and well-made horror sequel

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Countess Dracula

Network → Region B BD
£15 Approx



One of the most underrated films in the Hammer canon, this period chiller based on the legends surrounding Countess Erzsébet Báthory is as much concerned with court intrigue

as it is with leading lady Ingrid Pitt bathing in the blood of young women to keep herself youthful. Network's hi-def platter acquits itself well, with an attractive 1.66:1-framed 1080p encode and credible LPCM 2.0 dual-mono audio. Extras replicate those found on Network's 2006 Special Edition DVD, bolstered by four extensive photo galleries containing almost 500 images.



Hands of the Ripper

Network → Region B BD
£15 Approx



Grand Guignol-style gore clashes head-on with psychological melodrama in this supremely effective

Hammer chiller about Jack the Ripper's orphaned daughter. This equally well-crafted Blu-ray outing ratchets up the tension with a respectful 1.66:1 1080p encode and LPCM 2.0 dual-mono audio. Extras include a commentary featuring actress Angahard Rees alongside genre experts Kim Newman and Stephen Jones, an episode of the '70s TV series *Thriller* starring Rees, the trailer and sizeable galleries of production, behind-the-scenes, portrait and promo photos.



Twins of Evil

Network → Region B BD
£15 Approx



The third and final part of Hammer's Karnstein Trilogy (following *The Vampire Lovers* and *Lust for a Vampire*) finds the

studio at its exploitative best. Former *Playboy* Playmates Mary and Madeleine Collinson play orphaned identical twins, one of whom gives in to the seduction of vampiric evil, while Hammer stalwart Peter Cushing is on hand as their witch-hunting Puritan uncle. Again, Network's Blu-ray holds up fine, with nicely resolved 1.66:1 1080p transfer and LPCM 2.0 dual-mono audio. Sadly there are no extras this time around, just a deleted scene, trailers and photo galleries.



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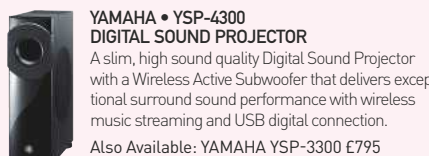


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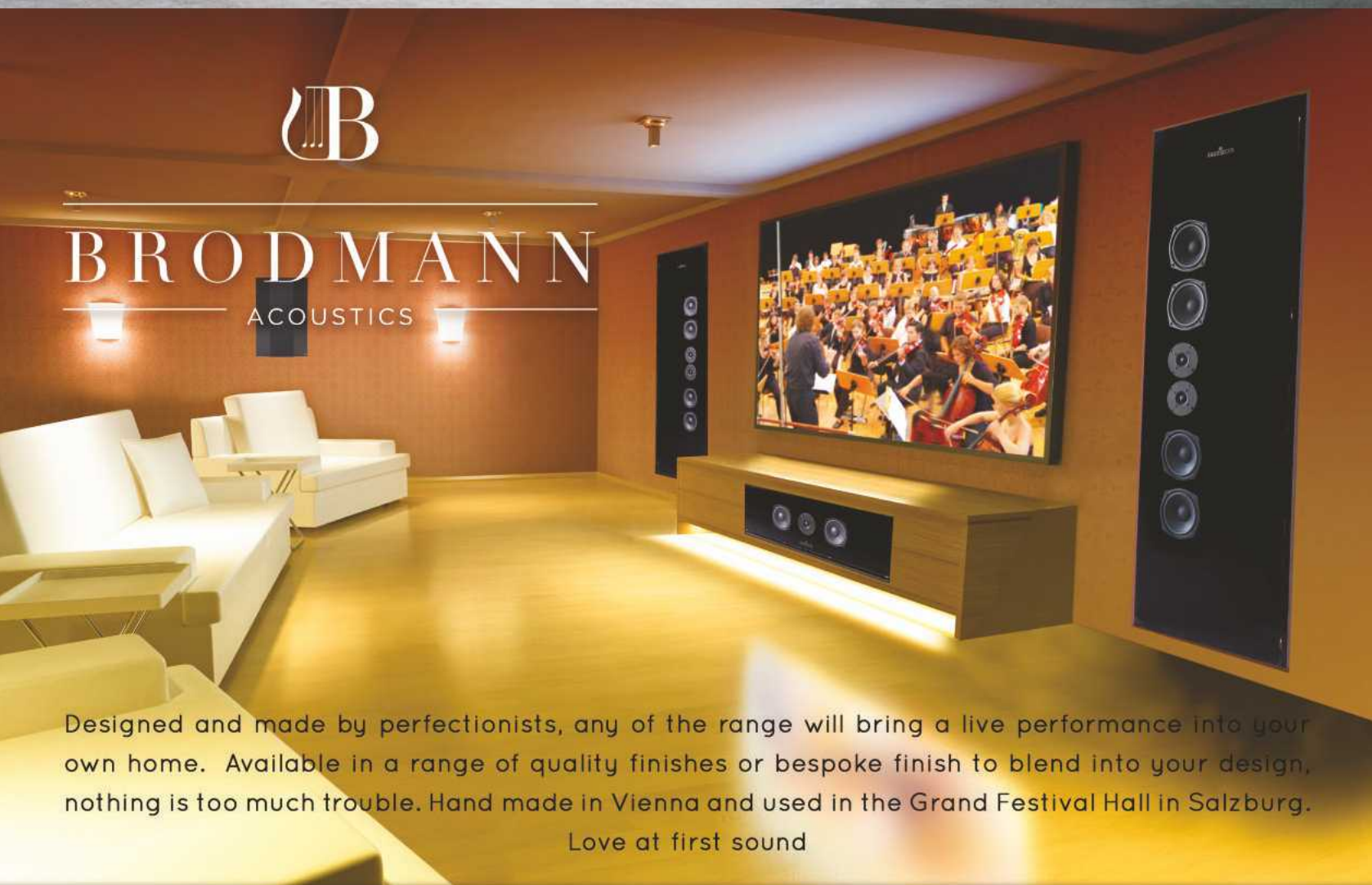
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Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★★☆☆
Dire	★★★☆☆

TOP 10 TELEVISIONS

All prices are approx and may have changed

**Sony KD-65X9005B** → £3,600

★★★★★

A groundbreaking set from Sony. The 'Wedge' cabinet design afford rooms for a best-in-class audio performance from the side-mounted speakers, while imagery is hard to fault, with crisp 4K images and impressive motion. *HCC #236*

**Samsung UE65HU8500** → £4,000 ★★★★★

This second-gen 4K flagship is a first-rate (curved) flatscreen with colour-rich, lethally-sharp images. The external connections box provides welcome futureproofing. *HCC #234*

**Panasonic TX-P60ZT65** → £3,800 ★★★★★

This plasma lives up to its 'Beyond Reference' billing, with the best 1080p picture in town – imagery is effortlessly cinematic. But at this price, you might want 4K... *HCC #233*

**Sony KDL-50W829** → £900 ★★★★★

Impressively affordable, Sony's 50in LED stands out courtesy of brilliant motion handling and sharp Full HD imagery. The new 2014 user interface offers a few Smart tricks, too. *HCC #233*

**John Lewis 55JL9000** → £1,600 ★★★★★

The department store enters the bigscreen arena with this LG WebOS-powered Smart TV with clever, integrated soundbar design and punchy HD visuals. *HCC #238*

**Samsung UE40H6400** → £650 ★★★★★

This mid-market TV will probably sell like hotcakes. It ignores 4K in favour of Full HD, and combines a pleasing AV performance with plenty of useful Smart features. *HCC #236*

**Samsung UE46H7000** → £1,300 ★★★★★

The Korean brand's top Full HD 'flat' screen for 2014, this is perhaps expensive, considering it misses out on some higher-end processing features. But it's still a solid performer. *HCC #235*

**Finlux 50F8075-T** → £600 ★★★★★

The best screen we've seen yet from the direct-retail corp, this 50-incher matches its affordability with a great user interface and solid, but not awe-inspiring, HD visuals. *HCC #234*

**Panasonic TX-50AX802** → £7,000 ★★★★★

This second-gen 4K TV again offers HDMI 2.0 and DisplayPort connectivity, joined by a well-contrasted colour-rich image and elegant design. Yet it draws a blank with Netflix 4K... *HCC #237*

**Sony KDL-55W955** → £1,600 ★★★★★

Top of the Japanese giant's 1080p line up, the W955 offers excellent motion handling and great sonics, but is held back by backlight uniformity errors and sluggish operation. *HCC #234*

TECH INFO: TELEVISIONS



What? No plasma?: The TV market is now dominated by LED-lit LCD screens, reaching sizes up to 90in. Manufacture and sale of plasma display panels (PDPs), which previously came into play above 42in, has all but ceased, although you may still find some end-of-line stock. With LED comes newer technologies. 4K models with a native resolution of 3,840 x 2,160 should at least be on your audition list if you're thinking of a new display; curved models, from the likes of Samsung and LG, are also a consideration if you want to really impress the neighbours...



Active or Passive: At the beginning of the 3D revolution, most TVs featured the Active system that uses relatively expensive, powered 3D specs to deliver Full HD images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs, which are increasingly common and now sold by LG, Philips, Toshiba, Sony, and Panasonic, have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of Full HD 3D is halved to 540 lines horizontally (but remains at 1,920 vertically). Glasses-free 3D, heralded by Toshiba's ZL2 TV, hasn't caught on.

TOP 5 BLU-RAY MOVIES

**The LEGO Movie 3D**

A fantastic family blockbuster (complete with LEGO versions of Batman and Superman), this gorgeous-looking 'toon packs a 5.1 punch and enough smart gags to keep you laughing all the way to the toy shop.

★★★★★

**A Hard Day's Night**

A brand-new 4K restoration adds plenty of sparkle to this iconic musical flick – the 1.75:1 Full HD image is faultless, while remixed 5.1 audio provides plenty of foot-tapping fun. Oodles of extras for Beatles hedz, too.

★★★★★

**Man of Steel 3D**

Looking for a lossless soundtrack that is guaranteed to push your audio setup to its absolute limits? Then do yourself (and your home cinema) a favour and pick up Superman's latest cinematic outing.

★★★★★

**Rush**

This Formula One biopic is simply magnificent, both in terms of production values/performances and its thrilling DTS-HD 5.1 mix. The BD hosts a nice selection of extras, too – an essential disc for petrolheads.

★★★★★

**Gravity 3D**

Alfonso Cuarón's sci-fi flick rewrites the rulebook on movie sound design, and stakes a claim to the 3D crown. A disc you'll return to again and again when you want to test your system – nice extras, too.

★★★★★

Top 10 BLU-RAY PLAYERS

All prices are approx and may have changed

- 1**  **Oppo BDP-103EU → £500 ★★★★★**
 Oppo's first deck for two years was worth waiting for. The universal BDP-103EU features a class-leading build and all manner of bonus goodies, including twin HDMI inputs. AV performance is faultless, and the onscreen menus are superb. A new model, the £600 BDP-103D, adds Darbee Visual Presence processing for you to play with. HCC #215/#228
- 2**  **Oppo BDP-105D → £1,000 ★★★★★**
 This heavyweight deck builds upon the premium picture performance of the BDP-103D with a wealth of audiophile upgrades – if you're serious about music, check it out. HCC #234
- 3**  **Panasonic DMP-BDT700 → £500 ★★★★★★**
 Claiming THX-certified 4K upscaling and HDMI 2.0 60p passthrough, this mid-range deck from Panasonic is a good partner for a modern display. Great audio option, too. HCC #237
- 4**  **Samsung BD-H6500 → £130 ★★★★★★**
 Our current fave bargain BD deck – actually Samsung's 'flagship' model – is packed with Smart features, including support for the brand's multiroom system, and super-quick in operation. HCC #236
- 5**  **Pioneer BDP-450 → £230 ★★★★★★**
 An affordable universal player, the BDP-450 ignores analogue outputs and concentrates solely on the digital age. Well-built and an assured performer. HCC #219
- 6**  **Denon DBT-3313UD → £900 ★★★★★★**
 As a 'transport', this universal deck lacks built-in decoders and analogue outs, but partner it with one of the brand's AVRs via Denon Link HD and you'll be rewarded. HCC #217
- 7**  **LG BP645 → £100 ★★★★★★**
 An affordable, likeable offering from LG. The BP645 claims Spotify compatibility and Wi-Fi-enabled headphone listening among its bonus features. Slim, but lightweight design. HCC #236
- 8**  **Sony BDP-S5200 → £100 ★★★★★★**
 Again using a compact bedroom-friendly design, Sony's quirky-looking deck is a good budget option, but not as Smart or as smooth to use as some of its price-point rivals. HCC #236
- 9**  **Pioneer BDP-160 → £130 ★★★★★★**
 The successor to the BDP-150 adds integrated Wi-Fi, making media file playback simpler. The Smart hub is still practically empty, but SACD support softens the blow. HCC #227
- 10**  **Toshiba BDX5500 → £120 ★★★★★★**
 The key attraction of Toshiba's £120 player (aside from its 3D, Miracast, 4K scaling and DLNA features) is its small form factor and vertical alignment. Good for space-tight setups. HCC #238

TECH INFO: BLU-RAY PLAYERS

Matching your deck to your AV receiver: Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a player, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your AV receiver. If you're still using an older model that doesn't offer HDMI inputs, then you'll need a Blu-ray player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy decoded hi-res surround sound formats. Similarly, older but still HDMI-equipped receivers may not be able to cope with 3D video signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one channelling audio to your receiver amp, the other piping video direct to your TV.

What about the PlayStation?: Sony's console still represents an easy path to hi-def heaven. For a low-budget home cinema system, the £200 PS3 Slim (160GB) makes a decent choice – especially if you like playing games (in 3D, if you fancy it). Control via a joystick is a pain, though, and the console runs more noisily than most BD spinners. The recent PS4 is a much better gaming machine, but currently doesn't offer 3D BD (or CD!) playback.



DEMO DELIGHT

Prometheus: Ridley Scott's return to the sci-fi genre is a treat for your senses, with a crystal-clear HD image and spine-tingling sonics. The 3D presentation of this outer-space horror is impressive too – it oozes depth and proves utterly immersive

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TOP 10 PROJECTORS

All prices are approx
and may have changed**Sony VPL-VW500ES** → £8,800

★★★★★

Sony's second-gen 4K projector is around half the price of the VPL-VW1000ES (below) and comes with HDMI 2.0 chipper and Triluminos colour wizardry. Auditioning this class PJ is a no-brainer. *HCC #228*

**JVC DLA-X500R** → £5,000 ★★★★★

Armed with a more adept third-generation of the brand's proprietary e-shift technology, the X500R continues JVC's winning ways – contrast rich, sharp and full of tweaks. *HCC #232*

**Epson EH-TW7200** → £1,900 ★★★★★

Priced to appeal to those unable to dabble in the £3,000 market, Epson's mid-ranger is a great purchase. No frame interpolation on offer, but colours, contrast and brightness impress. *HCC #232*

**JVC DLA-X700R** → £7,300 ★★★★★

A hefty chunk more expensive than the X500R, but with an improved contrast performance (and more flexible installation options) that will reward those who splash the cash. *HCC #238*

**SIM2 Super Lumis** → £37,000 ★★★★★

With a more potent lamp than its Lumis forebear, this light-cannon from SIM2 costs an arm and leg, and is only Full HD, but delivers an astonishing level of performance. *HCC #227*

**Philips Screeneo HDP1590** → £1,500 ★★★★★

Neatly designed, the Screeneo offers ultra-short throw projection thrills, albeit at 720p (and the DVB tuner is SD). Punchy speakers and networking skills complete a nice package. *HCC #233*

**Sony VPL-HW55ES** → £2,800 ★★★★★

Not one of Sony's 4K models, but this keenly priced Full HD projector delivers where it counts, with solid calibration options, simple setup and brilliant 2D visuals. No 12V trigger. *HCC #230*

**Epson EH-TW9200W** → £3,000 ★★★★★

A brilliant mid-range projector with wireless HD transmission and ISF certification, yet the noise generated when running in 'Normal' lamp mode could be a concern for some. *HCC #231*

**Acer 6510BD** → £500 ★★★★★

A Full HD projector that's 3D-ready (no glasses supplied), the Acer offers great value considering its lowly £500 ticket. Not the punchiest of pictures, but it'd be churlish to complain. *HCC #237*

**Optoma HD30** → £1,100 ★★★★★

A step up from the HD25 (below), this claims an increased contrast ratio and again offers a pleasing bigscreen performance. UI could be better, and zoom is somewhat limited. *HCC #233*

TECH INFO: PROJECTORS



Installation: Although projectors can be temporarily placed on a cupboard, stand or shelf situated at the rear of the room (use the adjustable feet on its base to level the image so that it aligns with the screen), a much better long-term solution is to mount it on your ceiling with an appropriate bracket. Projectors can be quite heavy, though, so it's important to ensure that the bracket is attached firmly – ideally, it should be secured to a joist. Position your PJ so that an imaginary line from its lens to the opposite side of the room hits the screen exactly half-way along its width. The location of your screen should therefore dictate where your projector is. A decent tape-measure or laser pointer will help you to determine the position.

Throw distance: Throw distance specifies the distance between the projector and screen for a focused image of given size. As the vast majority of projectors are equipped with a zoom lens, minimum and maximum throw distances are often specified – say, 3.01m to 6.08m for a 100in. 16:9 image. Shorter throw distances are ideal for smaller rooms, and longer ones for larger rooms. Simple.

Throw ratio: Sometimes, a manufacturer will quote a throw ratio rather than a throw distance. This is basically the throw distance divided by the image width. To get the projected image size, divide the distance between projector and screen by the specified figure. Once again, the inclusion of a zoom lens means that upper and lower figures are usually specified.

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Top 10 SPEAKERS

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B&W 683 Theatre 5.1 → £2,750

★★★★★

The first step on the floorstanding ladder in B&W's speaker stable, the revamped 600 Series incorporates new tweeter and bass driver designs and offers absurd value for money. Not the prettiest cabinets, but you really won't care. *HCC #234*



KEF R Series 7.1 → £6,500 ★★★★★

A 7.1 array mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this authoritative package takes its cues from KEF's Blade concept speaker and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. *HCC #217*



B&W MT-60D → £2,000 ★★★★★

This 5.1 set sits at the upper end of the sub/sat market, but buyers are rewarded by a potent performance, with the PVID subwoofer dazzling in particular. They look lovely, too. *HCC #212*



DALI Rubicon LCR 5.1 → £6,275 ★★★★★

Trickle-down tech from DALI's high-end Epicon speakers (including ribbon/dome hybrid tweeters) squeezed into on-wall cabinets – supremely adept with music and movies. *HCC #238*



Wharfedale Diamond 100 HCP → £950 ★★★★★

Yet another excellent affordable package from Wharfedale, the Diamond 100 HCP offers a sound quality beyond what you might expect from its sub-£1,000 ticket. Maturely styled. *HCC #224*



Kreisel Sound Quattro 7.2 → £8,500 ★★★★★

Mixing two mammoth woofers with some surprisingly manageable multi-tweeter speakers (including TriFX surrounds) this US package is supremely assured. *HCC #232*



Artcoustic Spitfire SL 7.2 → £17,000 ★★★★★

Slimmed-down cabinets now even easier to install on-wall or behind a screen, with a multi-driver design ensuring they're easy to drive to high SPLs. Ideal for dedicated rooms. *HCC #233*



Tannoy Precision Series 5.1 → £4,450 ★★★★★

These speakers' classic look belies the brand's hi-fi heritage, but this multichannel setup works wonders with movies, too – a rich, large and dynamic sound is on offer. *HCC #226*



Monitor Audio Radius R90HTI → £1,500 ★★★★★

The long-loved Radius speakers have been revamped with new drivers and rear ports, and this 5.1 set provides a clear, detailed sound with plenty of heft. Looks good in white, too. *HCC #230*



Roth Oli RA 5.1 → £850 ★★★★★

A floorstanding array with neat design and reassuring build, this value-for-money pack delivers an impressive slice of scale to go with its full-range prowess. *HCC #233*

TECH INFO: SPEAKERS



Centre speaker: Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible. Of course, if you're using a projector screen, it should ideally be placed behind it.

Front speakers: Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.

Subwoofer: Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

Surrounds: Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds – it is, in fact, where you should locate the sixth and seventh speakers (rears) in a traditional 7.1 array.

DEMO DELIGHT

Gravity: This award-winning sci-fi thriller was a cinematic showcase for the powers of Dolby Atmos – but even the BD's regular DTS-HD mix is something special. The audio design offers precision steering and panning effects all around the soundstage, plus deep LFE and crisp Foley effects. The opening scene is a great speaker show-off

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TOP 10 AV RECEIVERS/AV PROCESSORS

All prices are approx
and may have changed**Sony STR-DA5800ES** → £2,200

★★★★★

Sony's follow up to the STR-DA5700ES continues to pack handy features (built-in Ethernet switching, a unique video-on-demand platform), ups the channels to 9.2, and brings a suite of great post-processing modes. *HCC #223*

**Anthem MRX-510** → £1,700 ★★★★★

The Canadian brand returns in style with an AVR that ignores streaming/networking features but boasts supreme room EQ and eats movie soundtracks for breakfast. *HCC #232*

**Arcam AVR750** → £4,000 ★★★★★

If all you want from an AV receiver is vast power and effortless performance, this high-end 7.1-channel beast is tailored to you. Little bonus features beyond audio networking. *HCC #225*

**Krell Foundation** → £6,500 ★★★★★

One of the US marque's more affordable offerings, the Foundation is a seven-channel processor that delivers an insightful, smooth and epic sound. And it looks fab. *HCC #224*

**Yamaha CX-A5000** → £2,500 ★★★★★

Part of Yamaha's new high-end separates line (you can match it with the MX-A5000 amp), this 11-channel processor sounds clean, precise and offers a dizzying range of features. *HCC #228*

**Marantz AV8801** → £2,500 ★★★★★

The brand's high-end 11-channel processor offers balanced outputs and heavyweight engineering. Partner it with the MM8807 power amp for a supreme performance. *HCC #220*

**Primare SPA23** → £3,500 ★★★★★

A stripped-down five-channel amp that majors on sublime, and power-packed, multichannel delivery. Limited functionality, but that's not what this luxury slab is all about. *HCC #237*

**Pioneer VSX-924** → £500 ★★★★★

Pioneer's newest £500 model brings Bluetooth and Wi-Fi, an even better control app, HDMI 2.0 specification and under-the-hood tweaks. A great-value, great performer. *HCC #236*

**Yamaha RX-V577** → £500 ★★★★★

Loaded with DSP modes (some fun, some not) and Wi-Fi-enabled for audio streaming, this clean-sounding Yamaha is a great low-budget option. Bluetooth via optional dongle. *HCC #237*

**Sony STR-DN1050** → £500 ★★★★★

A fabulous user interface, smart design and excellent spatial imaging lend this Sony serious appeal, although we found the integrated Wi-Fi a bit flaky. *HCC #238*

TECH INFO: AV RECEIVERS



Tackling new heights: You may find your AV receiver offering Dolby Pro-Logic IIz, Audyssey DSX or DTS Neo: X post-processing – possibly all three. All of these can deliver two further Front Height channels, with the aim of adding weight and control to the front soundstage, particularly in terms of lifting the centre channel and adding scale to vertical surround effects – rainfall for example. The catch is that you will need to add two new physical speakers, mounted near your ceiling above the regular left and right channel cabinets, and make use of two of the receiver's channels of amplification, which could mean forgoing a second stereo zone or rear surrounds speakers. Note that the Audyssey and DTS modes also cater for Front Wide speakers (pictured above), but this idea seems to be gaining less traction within the industry.

How much power?: Many of the mass-market AV receiver manufacturers are involved in a specifications race to see who can say their model is the most powerful, which can be confusing for consumers. For instance, both Krell's £7,000 S-1500 seven-channel power amp and Yamaha's £500 RX-V675 both claim 7 x 150W – the important part is that Krell's figure is into an eight-ohm load with all channels driven, and that Yamaha's is with one channel into a four-ohm load, which is hardly a real-world situation. The best advice is ignore the numbers game and get a demo of your desired AVR with the same, or similar, speakers that you intend to partner it with.

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Top 10 SUBWOOFERS

All prices are approx & may have changed

- 

Bowers & Wilkins DB1 → £3,250 ★★★★★
Featuring a bipolar arrangement of 12in drivers powered by 1,000W of amplification, B&W's stylish flagship sub is a faultless performer, offering both musicality and sheer muscle. Fit to partner the finest of speakers. *HCC #197*
- 

SVS SB-2000 → £650 ★★★★★
With a new 12in driver and revamped 500W Sledge DSP amplifier, this mid-sized woofer offers immense value for money and imbibes BDs with potent LFE. Easily recommended. *HCC #233*
- 

JL Audio Fathom F212 → £5,900 ★★★★★
The US brand arrives in the UK in style – this 2 x 12in, 3,000W brute not only looks gorgeous, it's capable of a mindblowing performance. Got a big room? Get one of these! *HCC #214*
- 

Tannoy TS2.12 → £550 ★★★★★
The TS2.12 is easily Tannoy's best woofer yet – using a 12in driver (opposite a passive 12in cone) and 500W amp to deliver a rich, bass performance. Affordable and good-looking, too. *HCC #208*
- 

REL S-5 → £1,600 ★★★★★
A step up from the T series (below), this 12in model is large and weighty, with a performance level to match. Fast and tight but capable of dropping very low indeed. *HCC #234*
- 

REL T-7 → £650 ★★★★★
The T-7 uses an 8in driver in tandem with a 10in passive radiator, and features simultaneous speaker-level and LFE inputs and Class A/B amplification. An excellent all-rounder. *HCC #223*
- 

Bowers & Wilkins PVID → £1,200 ★★★★★
On of the coolest-looking subs on the planet, B&W's revamped PVI uses DSP trickery to craft an opulent low-end performance. The touch-sensitive OLED display is pure class. *HCC #212*
- 

REL Habitat 1 → £1,300 ★★★★★
With its LongBow wireless system and wall-mountable design, REL's newest woofer is aimed at those seeking discreet bass. Twin 6.5in drivers work fast and with considerable grip. *HCC #231*
- 

SVS SB12-NSD → £650 ★★★★★
A 12in driver squeezed into the smallest enclosure possible, the SB12-NSD packs a 400W 'Sledge' amp and offers a weighty yet fast and accurate sound. Looks a bit bland, though. *HCC #223*
- 

Quadral Qube 10 → £525 ★★★★★
A gorgeous-looking woofer with a build quality that belies its lowly price tag, the Qube 10 takes Quadral's musical heritage and delivers a controlled, poised performance. *HCC #223*

TECH INFO



Why use more than one sub?: Using two subwoofers (or perhaps four) should, in theory, bring huge rewards in terms of bass performance. But remember that LFE is a tricky beast to control. Running two subs may simply double problems in your room like room boom and suck-outs, where outgoing and reflected bass sounds cancel each other out. If you have some flexibility in where you place subwoofers, trial and error may well throw up some interesting results. The acoustics wizard Floyd E Toole (his book *Sound Reproduction: The Acoustics and Psychoacoustics of Loudspeakers and Rooms* is fine bedtime reading) suggests one LFE sub to either side of the room may be best for accuracy while placing them in the front corners would be best for overall bass power. Yet there is no hard and fast rule as to what will work best for every room, and you may find that simply using one (large) subwoofer is preferable as it's the easiest to get sounding right.

DEMO DELIGHT

The LEGO Movie: This colourful, great-looking animation from Warner Bros. is a visual treat on Blu-ray, and matched by a 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio mix that revels in its use of the LFE channel. Stonking bass is the order of the day here – the bangs, thumps and explosions of the manic 'toon action are underpinned by a forceful, full-bodied low-end that's guaranteed to get the most out of your subwoofer.

Top 5 HD GAMES



Ultra Street Fighter IV
New characters, stages and gameplay mechanics make this update of the four-year-old title the best beat-'em up around. If you're having a family row over what film to watch, this is the best way to settle it.
★★★★★



Forza Motorsport 5
This game's headline trick is delivering its huge car collection and decent selection of tracks in wonderfully detailed 1080p at a silky smooth 60fps. That it's not quite perfect – dodgy AI, for a start – is less important.
★★★★★



Grand Theft Auto V
Rockstar's newest slice of car-jacking, gun-wielding fun is absolutely massive in both scale and ambition – a big-budget game that will leave a big grin on your face. Graphically gorgeous, and the 5.1 mix isn't bad, either.
★★★★★



Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag
This sequel takes to the high seas for piratical fun, with an enormous open world, absorbing gameplay, beautiful graphics and a soundtrack packed with well-realised ambient effects.
★★★★★



Titanfall
EA redefines the online shooter with this breathtaking arena blaster that ups the ante on the competition with its fluid run-and-gun mechanics, giant mechs you can take control of and gorgeous graphics.
★★★★★

TOP 10 ACCESSORIES

All prices are approx and may have changed

- 1 Now TV box → £10 ★★★★★**
 An unqualified bargain, this Wi-Fi VOD streamer from Sky (and built upon Roku hardware) brings BBC iPlayer, Demand 5 and the Roku Channel Store to any HDMI-toting telly, plus subscription access to Sky Movies and Sky Sports. The quality of the adaptive bitrate streaming is impressive, and the £10 tag gets you P&P and an HDMI cable. *HCC #226*
- 2 Sony SRS-X9 → £600 ★★★★★**
 A Wi-Fi, Airplay and Bluetooth speaker with a penchant for hi-res audio, Sony's premium one-box design offers a fine build, quality drivers and a beguiling performance. *HCC #235*
- 3 Panasonic DMC-GH4 → £1,750 ★★★★★**
 Easy-to-use DSLR camera with an AV trick – capturing 4K video files at up to 30fps. Files sizes are large (get a 32GB SD card) but image quality is sensational. Perfect for early adopters. *HCC #237*
- 4 Dune HD Base 3D → £250 ★★★★★**
 A media player for the AV enthusiast. Full-width and fully-featured, it provides support for 3D BD rips and much more, with a slick user interface and plenty of connectivity. *HCC #235*
- 5 Sony MDR-HW700DS → £450 ★★★★★**
 Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI-toting surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late nights. *HCC #234*
- 6 Philips Hue → £180 ★★★★★**
 These Wi-Fi enabled lightbulbs might be expensive (this £180 starter pack includes two, plus the Wi-Fi bridge) but making your own multicoloured lighting scheme is a blast. *HCC #220*
- 7 Monitor Audio Airstream A100 → £400 ★★★★★**
 Partner your TV with the speakers of your choice with this networked, AirPlay-streaming two-channel amp. Great, sleek design – bit awkward to control, though. *HCC #238*
- 8 Roku Streaming Stick → £50 ★★★★★**
 Adopting the same form as Google's Chromecast, this HDMI stick gives full access to Roku's lengthy channel list and enables content sharing from a smartphone. Great for old TVs. *HCC #235*
- 9 Microsoft Xbox One → £430 ★★★★★**
 Not as graphically potent as the PS4 (below) but the new Xbox lives up to its billing as a home entertainment hub – voice control and multi-tasking tricks prove very useful. *HCC #230*
- 10 Sony PlayStation 4 → £350 ★★★★★**
 The PS4 offers a killer gaming experience, with the under-the-hood power resulting in great-looking games. Yet it has a few foibles. Wanna play 3D BDs? You'll be disappointed. *HCC #229*

TECH INFO: MEDIA PLAYERS



What about my TV?: Many flatscreen TVs from the major brands (Sony, Samsung, Panasonic, LG, Toshiba and Sharp) also incorporate media player functionality, using Ethernet or Wi-Fi to stream from your home network, or from plugged-in USB drives. Most modern Blu-ray players offer this, too. However, file support is rarely as extensive as on dedicated devices from the likes of Western Digital and A.C. Ryan, and our experience shows some are more adept at playback from USB than over a network. Nor (obviously) is a TV or BD player portable. If your media collection extends beyond JPEGs and MP3s into lossless audio rips and esoteric HD video formats, then a standalone player is a good investment.

Storage: You can, if you really want, store all your files on a plethora of USB drives, or on your PC, but it's best to get a NAS (Network Attached Storage) device for simplified sharing of your media across a network with



multiple players, such as one from Netgear's ReadyNAS range (pictured). These dedicated devices often offer RAID array file backup, and are managed via browser software. Storage capacity can be anything from 1TB to 12TB and beyond.

TOP 5 BLU-RAY/DVD BOX SETS

**Game of Thrones: The Complete Third Season**

More fantastic fantasy TV delivered on Blu-ray – as with previous seasons, the AV quality here ensures the show's big-budget bombast shines through.

★★★★★

**True Detective: Season One**

HBO's award-winning eight-part crime series starring Hollywood heavyweights Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson arrives on BD looking great. Essential viewing.

★★★★★

**Boardwalk Empire: Season Four**

Another dozen episodes of Prohibition-era gangster fun starring Steve Buscemi, delivered with beautiful hi-def transfers and brilliantly immersive 5.1 DTS-HD audio.

★★★★★

**Video Nasties: The Definitive Guide Part Two**

Superb three-disc DVD package partnering a feature-length documentary about the 'video nasties' craze of the 80s/90s with trailers/analysis of 83 of the controversial films in question.

★★★★★

**Twin Peaks: The Entire Mystery**

Both seasons of the US cult TV series and the prequel flick ...Fire Walk With Me are given a fan-pleasing 10-disc BD release, sporting 7.1 DTS-HD audio and a treasure trove of bonus bits.

★★★★★

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TOP 5 PVRs

**Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription**

This triple-tuner PVR offers ultimate recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and awesome TiVo functionality. A no brainer if you're in a cable area

★★★★★

**Sky+HD, £subscription**

Sky's channel choice is second-to-none and its twin tuner 2TB PVR is a perfect partner. The recent EPG tweak is welcome and Anytime (the push VOD service) is brilliant for catching up on new movies

★★★★★

**Panasonic DMR-HW220, £250**

Panasonic's PVR mixes a 1TB hard drive with its Smart Viera functionality and media streaming – so at £250 it's an absolute steal, regardless of the uninspired design

★★★★★

**Pure Avalon 300R Connect, 1TB, £350**

Pure's debut Freeview+ HD offering is assured. While it can't match YouView for VOD content, the user interface here is unrivalled and four-way HDMI switching a welcome addition

★★★★★

**Samsung BD-H8900, £330**

This 1TB model combines a Freeview+ PVR with a Smart BD player. Loaded with bonus features (CD ripping anyone?) but a little uninspired in build, and the IPTV and Freeview elements remain segregated.

★★★★★

TOP 5 SOUNDBARS

**Yamaha YAS-103, £230**

Bluetooth-enabled and app-controllable, this speaker-enclosure solution boasts a great design and solid build. Audio from its 2.1-channel driver array is rich, clean and surprisingly potent

★★★★★

**Canton DM 50, £400**

This sturdily built soundbase speaker may lack HDMI inputs but makes up for it with Bluetooth streaming and a full-bodied 2.1-channel performance. Movies and music benefit from clarity and power

★★★★★

**Monitor Audio ASB-2, £1,000**

This premium proposition marries Monitor Audio's C-CAM drivers with AirPlay and DLNA music streaming. Performance is exemplary – powerful and polished in equal measure

★★★★★

**Philips HTL9100, £600**

A soundbar/sub that incorporates two removable side speakers to allow it to become a wireless 5.1 system, this Philips is a neat proposition. Easy to install and with a heavyweight sound.

★★★★★

**Q Acoustics Media 4, £400**

A no-nonsense offering from the speaker specialist, which ignores HDMI inputs and daft DSP modes in favour of creating a nuanced and impressively solid 2.1 soundscape. Punchy, controlled and well-built.

★★★★★

TOP 5 SYSTEMS

**Panasonic SC-BTT590, £630**

The use of new bamboo/charcoal drivers and noise-shaping tech pays dividends here, with a classy sound quality to match the wealth of features (3D BD, Smart TV and more)

★★★★★

**Samsung HT-H7750WM, £850**

The top-flight system from Samsung in 2014 uses tallboy speakers all around. Plenty of features here, and a fulsome 5.1 performance, but the build quality is a bit disappointing

★★★★★

**Harman/Kardon BDS470, £650**

Harman's 2.1 system eschews 'net TV and streaming features, but majors in heavyweight build quality and solid AV performance. We tested a 2.1 iteration – 5.1 is also available

★★★★★

**LG BH8220B, £650**

With its silver finish, this is a suitable one-box system to partner with LG's flatscreen TVs, with a commendable, if slightly lacking in HF finesse, sound. Additional features including CD-ripping to USB. Handy

★★★★★

**Panasonic SC-HTB570, £350**

A commendable slim-line 2.1 system that can also be clicked together to make a soundbar. The punchy wireless subwoofer does a lot of the work. Bluetooth music streaming is onboard

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA

Choice

→ IN THE NEXT ISSUE

New for 2014 – all the hottest kit from the IFA and CEDIA technology shows revealed
Demopad – smart control for all!
Beyond Blu-ray – everything you need to know about streaming movies

→ ON TEST

Parasound A Series power amplifier Philips 55PUS7809 4K TV Neat Acoustics Motive SX speakers Panasonic DMR-BWT740 PVR/player Samsung 55HU8200 TV Sony FDR-AX100 4K 'corder PLUS News, software, opinion, installs and more!

ISSUE
#240 ON SALE
Oct 16

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



AV RECEIVERS

YAMAHA: 2014 - 2015 HOME CINEMA AMP MODELS

YAMAHA
RX-V377
BLACK | SILVER

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
AUG 2014



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

AVENTAGE
YAMAHA
RX-A1040 NEW
BLACK | SILVER

YAMAHA
RX-V477
BLACK | SILVER



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

AVENTAGE
YAMAHA
RX-A2040 NEW
BLACK | SILVER

YAMAHA
RX-V677
BLACK | SILVER

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
OCT 2014



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

AVENTAGE
YAMAHA
RX-A3040 NEW
BLACK | SILVER

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SPITFIRE CINEMA
FIXED FRAME SCREEN NEW
92-INCH TO 150-INCH



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EPSON EH-TW6100
HD PROJECTOR

SPITFIRE CINEMA
TAB TENSION SCREEN NEW
92-INCH TO 120-INCH



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE



EPSON EH-TW9200-W
HD PROJECTOR

SPITFIRE CINEMA
IN-CEILING SCREEN NEW
92-INCH TO 120-INCH



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE



SONY VPL-HW40ES NEW
HD PROJECTOR

5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGES

SURROUND SOUND: THE MONITOR AUDIO WAY

MONITOR AUDIO
RADIUS R90 HT1 NEW
BLACK | WHITE | WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
OCT 2013



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

COMPACT YET
POWERFUL

MONITOR AUDIO
SILVER 6 AV12 NEW
2 GLOSS | 4 VENEER FINISHES

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
MAR 2014



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

PURE PERFORMANCE
NO COMPROMISE

MONITOR AUDIO
MASS 5.1
WHITE NEW | BLACK

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
AUG 2012



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

BEST FOR
BUDGET

5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGES

OUR TOP-SELLING SURROUND SOUND PACKAGES

Q ACOUSTICS Q70001
BLACK | WHITE

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
AUG 2012



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

2014 BEST SELLER
MULTI AWARD
WINNER

DALI ZENSOR 5 AV 5.1
BLACK | WHITE | WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
NOV 2013



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

TANNOY MERCURY
V4i AV 5.1 NEW
MAPLE | DARK WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND PICTURE
★★★★★
AUG 2011



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

TRADITIONAL STYLE
PURE PERFORMANCE

TV STANDS

HOUSE YOUR KIT WITH CLASS

JUST RACKS JRL-1101
WHITE | BLACK



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

PERFECT FOR
SOUNDBARS!

ROOM FOR
CENTRE SPEAKERS



JUST RACKS JRA-150
GLOSS BLACK

ALPHASON FINWOODS
OAK | WALNUT | BLACK



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

TV BRACKET
OPTION



ALPHASON CHROMIUM
SIX COLOUR FINISHES

SPECTRAL SCALA
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SPECTRAL HIGH END
CLEAR | FROSTED | BLACK



ATACAMA ELITE ECO
BAMBOO | 3 FINISHES



SPECTRAL CD SHELVEING
CLEAR | FROSTED | BLACK

WALL
OR
FLOOR

0% Finance

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OCT 2013



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE



WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
DEC 2011

**ROKSAN KANDY,
K2 CD & AMPLIFIER**
BLACK | SILVER

**AUDIOLAB 8200 CD,
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BLACK | SILVER



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE



**TEAC REFERENCE
AI501 / PD501HR
COMPACT HI-FI**
BLACK | SILVER

**MARANTZ 6005
CD & AMPLIFIER**
BLACK | SILVER

WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
MAY 2014



**YAMAHA A-N500
CD & AMPLIFIER** NEW
BLACK | SILVER

HI-FI SPEAKERS

THE LATEST AND GREATEST PAIRS OF LOUDSPEAKERS

**Q ACOUSTICS
CONCEPT 40** NEW
BLACK | WHITE

WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
MAY 2014

AWARD-WINNING
'CONCEPT'
DESIGN



**MONITOR AUDIO
SILVER 10** NEW
2 GLOSS
4 VENEER FINISHES

BEST FOR
LARGE ROOMS



**WHARFEDALE
DIAMOND 121**
3 FINISHES

WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
OCT 2013



DALI ZENSOR 1
3 FINISHES

WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
AUGUST 2011



CABLES & INTERCONNECTS

THE CONNECTION IS MADE

**QED REFERENCE
AUDIO 40** NEW
STEREO PHONO
RCA CABLE PAIR

RE-DESIGNED
PLUGS



**AUDIOQUEST
FLX-SLIP 14/4
SPEAKER CABLE**

WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
NOV 2012

WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
OCT 2012



**AUDIOQUEST
CINNAMON
HDMI CABLE**

WHAT HI-FI? **STAND-OUT SOUND**
★★★★★
JAN 2011

LATEST
SPEC



**WIREWORLD
STARLIGHT
HDMI CABLE**

LONG
LENGTHS
AVAILABLE



WIRELESS SPEAKERS

NO COMPLICATION, UTTERLY SIMPLE TO ENJOY

DALI KUBIK NEW
RED | WHITE | BLACK



BLUETOOTH



**MONITOR AUDIO
S300**
WHITE | BLACK



AIRPLAY



**GENEVA LABS
MODEL S**
RED | WHITE | BLACK

DENON ENVAYA NEW
WHITE | BLACK



**BANG & OLUFSEN
BEOLIT12**
GREY | DARK GREY



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BLACK | CLEAR



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CANTILEVER



**FISUAL DAC2000
DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE
CONVERTER** NEW

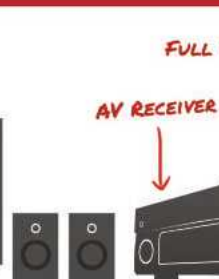
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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson says there's no more middle ground when it comes to home cinema entertainment, and hopes you can remember a key scene from *The Matrix*...

THERE ARE BIG choices heading your way. The battle for living room entertainment space will be fought out on the principles of convenience and performance, and you will have to take a side. The blue pill – compact entertainment systems with simple, family-friendly operation – will allow prescribers to live the illusion of ignorance. The red pill, which offers proper high-res entertainment, is an escape into the real world and the truth of reality.

Sitting here, in my long, black leather coat, it is very clear to see this *mêlée* gaining even greater momentum in two-channel audio and really polarising customer choice. On one side you have Sonos, a tidal wave of Sonos clones, and music services that push 320kbps MP3 quality at the absolute best and usually a lot worse. On the other, you have the launch of Qobus's high-res audio streaming service in the UK and high-res streaming products. **You pays your money and takes your choice, because there really isn't any middle ground.** Blue pill or red pill?

So here's the thing; it is happening in home cinema, too. In video there is the emergence of more UHD content to match the swathe of 4K TVs now on offer, including Samsung launching a 4K VOD service via Amazon in October. People who subscribe to premium HD content – Sky HD channels for example – will move to UHD. Those that don't, and are happy with Freeview and the non-subscription HD channels, will stick to watching the bulk of their viewing in native standard-definition. The gulf between people who are willing to pay for 4K content and hardware and those that are happy with their existing TV and SD content is widening, again leaving something of a hole in the middle.

The launch of Atmos is going to have much the same effect on multichannel audio systems for

home cinema. Atmos is the most significant new audio technology to hit domestic AV for nearly a decade and, from Dolby's own 'home cinema' demos, it sounds fantastic. With new upward-facing speakers becoming available, a 5.1.4 Atmos system is much easier to install than even an old 7.1 channel system and that gives it a lot of appeal. Yet implementing Atmos does require a new AVR or processor, new speakers and more cabling, and it is more complex to set up. It is the true red pill of AV.

The relentless rise of the soundbar

And the alternate reality, blue-pill, option? Soundbars and soundbases. These products have gone from an unheard-of concept to the most pervasive of living room audio products in a matter of just a couple of years. We, as *HCC* readers, know that their forte is ultimate convenience at the cost of performance. But what would you recommend to a friend if they asked you for a 'not too expensive' audio upgrade from a soundbar? Decent, low-cost 5.1 system packages complete with surround processing are dying a death as brands have switched to 'bars and 'bases. Moreover, the entry price of a proper Atmos home cinema, AVR plus speakers and cabling, has got to be well over £1,500.

Even for existing AV-hedz, the transition to Atmos could be as traumatic as Neo's exit from the Matrix. My £6,000 Denon AV processor won't do Atmos or 4K, so needs replacing, and the bill for more amp channels and more speakers to match the rest of the system is looking painful. Had I not been to Dolby's Atmos demo I might have been able to take on Cypher's philosophy that 'ignorance is bliss'. As it is, I have taken the red pill and there's no going back ■

*Is the AV industry failing to provide a middle-ground option?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*



After first watching *The Matrix*, **Richard Stevenson** spent two days walking around pretending he was in a bullet-time slo-mo FX sequence

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